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RIZ AHMED
I find my lack of Star Wars fandom... disturbing
metroLIFE

METRO ASKS

What does reconciliation mean to you?

We asked four local indigenous leaders on the one-year anniversary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report

JESSICA BOTELHO-URBANSKI FOR METRO

<p><small>LYLE STAFFORD/FOR METRO</small></p> <p>'It means as we go forward that we're making every effort we can as Canadians — as indigenous Canadians and other Canadians — to get to a better place in terms of that historic divide ... between ourselves as indigenous people and Canada as a country.'</p> <p>Damon Johnston, president of the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg</p>	<p><small>THE CANADIAN PRESS</small></p> <p>'Being respectful of our point of view.... What was most important is the first five calls to action (from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report) were to address the issues of child welfare and Jordan's Principle. Meanwhile, that was a year ago. I haven't seen glimmers of change yet.'</p> <p>Cora Morgan, First Nations family advocate, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs</p>	<p><small>WHITNEY LIGHT/CONTRIBUTED</small></p> <p>'The hopeful side of me sees it as an opportunity to band together as one people to acknowledge our shared history and how that reverberates into the present.... The negative side of me sees it as a word politicians use to try and seem accommodating towards indigenous people.'</p> <p>Sonya Ballantyne, indigenous filmmaker and director of Crash Site</p>	<p><small>UWSA/CONTRIBUTED</small></p> <p>'Them (the government) not perpetuating violence against our people — systemic violence or just straight-up violence with RCMP and military — when people are trying to protect our land. And I think that real reconciliation isn't building pipelines.'</p> <p>Kevin Settee, University of Winnipeg Students' Association president</p>
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Birchwood KIA ON REGENT

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Trudeau's details 'two tracks'

RECONCILIATION

Plans to reset indigenous relationship announced

Ottawa must follow two separate tracks in its reconciliation efforts with indigenous people, says Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: taking broader, long-term steps to rebuild the relationship, while also addressing urgent short-term needs.

Trudeau was addressing the former track at a news conference Thursday when the latter one tragically intervened: a house fire on a southern Ontario First Nation that killed five members of the same family: a father, three young children and a baby.

"Obviously, our thoughts and hearts go out to families affected by this most recent incident," said Trudeau, flanked by the indigenous leaders with whom he'd spent the morning meeting.

"We've taken significant measures, concretely, to build solutions and partnerships with indigenous communities, but we know that it is not just about immediate Band-Aids and immediate quick fixes."

The relationship between the federal government and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada has to be "renewed and rebuilt," Trudeau continued — a process that is not going to be complete any time soon.

"The challenges we are facing will take not just years, but decades in many cases to fully reverse, fully establish the right kind of relationship moving forward."



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks with the media after meeting with Manitoba Metis Federation President David Chartrand, back left to right, Assembly of First Nations Chief Perry Bellegarde President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Natan Obed on Parliament Hill on Thursday. ADRIAN WYLD/THE CANADIAN PRESS

"The challenges we are facing will take not just years, but decades in many cases to fully reverse, fully establish the right kind of relationship moving forward."

Justin Trudeau

right kind of relationship moving forward."

Trudeau's remarks came well before officials on the Oneida Nation of the Thames, located 25 kilometres southwest of London, Ont., confirmed that five people

died in the blaze, which began Wednesday night.

"First Nations housing is in a crisis," said Oneida Chief Randall Phillips, who described the house as "just basically kindling."

"We will continue to point

to the federal government and provincial government to make sure that they uphold their responsibility to make sure that we have safe homes here. But this is a perfect example of us not being able to refurbish or fix houses that are in need of repair."

In a statement, Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett said she was deeply saddened to learn of the tragedy, adding the government is "steadfast in our commitment to work with First Nations to ensure the safety of

their communities."

Trudeau pointed out \$8.4 billion that was set aside in the March budget to address "urgent needs," including lifting boil-water advisories across the country, "with more to come in the coming months and years."

But his main purpose Thursday was to acknowledge the one-year anniversary of the final report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by putting down a marker on the government's effort to reset its relationship with indigenous peoples.

He said cabinet ministers would meet at least twice a year with First Nation, Metis and Inuit leaders to tackle shared priorities, while the government sets up an interim board of directors as a precursor to a National Council for Reconciliation.

The government is also providing \$10 million to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba.

The TRC, led by Murray Sinclair, Manitoba's first indigenous judge, issued 94 sweeping recommendations after a six-year examination of the impact of Canada's residential school system, part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

Sinclair, now an independent senator, cheered Thursday's announcements but said calls for both a royal proclamation on reconciliation and a national action plan are still awaiting a response.

The commission also wants to see an end to Section 43 of the Criminal Code, which permits corporal punishment, and sustainable funding for healing to address the long-term and intergenerational impacts of residential schools.

"So long as they remain unaddressed, other efforts toward changing the understanding of each other and mutual respect will remain elusive," Sinclair said during a speech in the Senate.

Trudeau should be commended for the prompt announcement of the inquiry on murdered and missing indigenous women, Sinclair noted. Hearings are expected to begin next spring. THE CANADIAN PRESS



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Bears think with their stomachs. That's a real problem when you get hungry bears around people.

Andrew Derocher

A polar bear walks across the street in Churchill, Man., in 2009. Provincial data indicates polar-bear encounters have reached record levels around Hudson Bay. JONATHAN HAYWARD/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Record bear confrontations

WILDLIFE

Late ice sees animals wander into Churchill

Manitoba conservation officials say late sea ice formation on Hudson Bay has led to a record number of polar bear encounters

with the people of Churchill.

Polar bears came too close to town almost 390 times this year — a jump from 351 in 2015 and 229 in 2013. Some 53 bears were held in the town's so-called polar-bear jail, and all had been released by last week.

Daryll Hedman with Manitoba Conservation said the sea ice didn't form until well into

December, leaving hungry polar bears crowded on the shore.

"They were sitting there waiting. There were some pretty big concentrations of males out there," he said. "On record, this is the latest year ever."

Canada is home to two-thirds of the world's polar bears, but experts say climate change could make the Hudson Bay population

extinct within a few decades.

Polar bears depend on winter hunting to build up enough fat to carry them through the lean summer months on land where food is scarce. But Arctic waters freeze up later in the year and thaw much earlier in the spring. That leaves polar bears with less time to bulk up on fatty seal meat while on the ice.

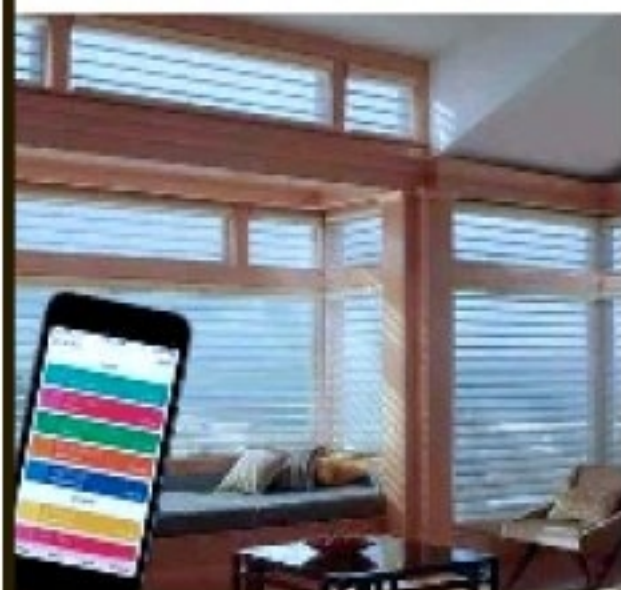
As the bears spend more time on land with less fat, they grow hungry and can venture into town in search of food. Where the first encounters with polar bears used to be late August, conservation officials say polar bears are now coming into contact with people as early as July 1.

Andrew Derocher, one of the country's leading polar-bear ex-

perts based at the University of Alberta, said there will likely come a year when the bears will come off the ice in poor shape and won't be able to survive until the ice freezes again.

"The longer the ice-free period is in Hudson Bay, the worse it is for the bears. Definitely, 2016 was getting out there," Derocher said. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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HUDSON'S BAY

Pot advocates back proposals

LEGALIZING MARIJUANA

Task force did their homework, activist says



Braeden Jones
Metro | Winnipeg

Local marijuana advocates say there are more highs than lows in recommendations for legalization made by a federal task force this week.

"It's extremely net-positive," said Steven Stairs, a medical marijuana user and grower who helps organize Winnipeg's 420 rallies.

Stairs said for the most part, he's supportive of the key recommendations, including legal use beginning at 18 or 19 years of age, allowing the sale of edible cannabis products, and capping public possession at 30 grams.

"For the majority, it seems like (the federal task force) took a lot of time, they did their homework," he said.

But it's not all good. "For some of them, it's like they didn't put any thought into at all and advocates like me are like, 'OK, how come you did this,

which is so sensible, and then this, which is out to lunch,'" he said.

For instance, the task force calls for higher taxes on products with greater levels of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

Stairs explained how different people react to or tolerate THC differently, depending on all kinds of factors including their experience with it, height and weight, or metabolism.

"The potency tax is forcing people to be penalized for needing to consume a higher potency," he said. "That's just not going to be fair."

Another point he took issue with was allowing a personal cultivation of four plants with a 100-centimetre height limit — Stairs called both stipulations "arbitrary," noting things like strain and environment affect plant height, but plant height doesn't affect anything, making the restriction "strange."

"They don't have to be tall ... I could train my pot plant to grow sideways in a big long bush but could still pull six pounds (of weed) off the thing," he said.

His hope is that the less palatable recommendations are left out of the equation when marijuana is legalized, but he doesn't expect "to see a huge departure."

Don "King of Cannabis" Brier, owner of Weeds Glass and Gifts stores across the country including the Winnipeg location, said he agrees with most of the recommendations, particularly the storefront sales portion.

"People want to be able to go to their local store, pick up what they need," he said.

Like Stairs, the potency tax is his biggest concern — he thinks it's "not at all valid."

"Tobacco is tobacco, and whether it's beer or hard liquor, they tax it at the same rate," he said.

His favourite recommendation, and one he was surprised to see, was the recommendation to allow establishments to permit consumption, like "vapour lounges."

"You can't just sell weed and say, 'OK, go get outside and smoke that,' he said. "It's better because this way people aren't wandering around ... they're in a good safe place."

He said the franchises of Weeds Glass and Gifts, Winnipeg's included, could all become future vapour lounges.

"The recommendations are really fantastic, for the most part," Brier said.

I could train my pot plant to grow sideways in a big long bush.
Steven Stairs



Don "King of Cannabis" Brier, owner of Weeds Glass and Gifts stores, said he agrees with most of the recommendations for legalization of marijuana made by a federal task force, particularly the storefront sales portion.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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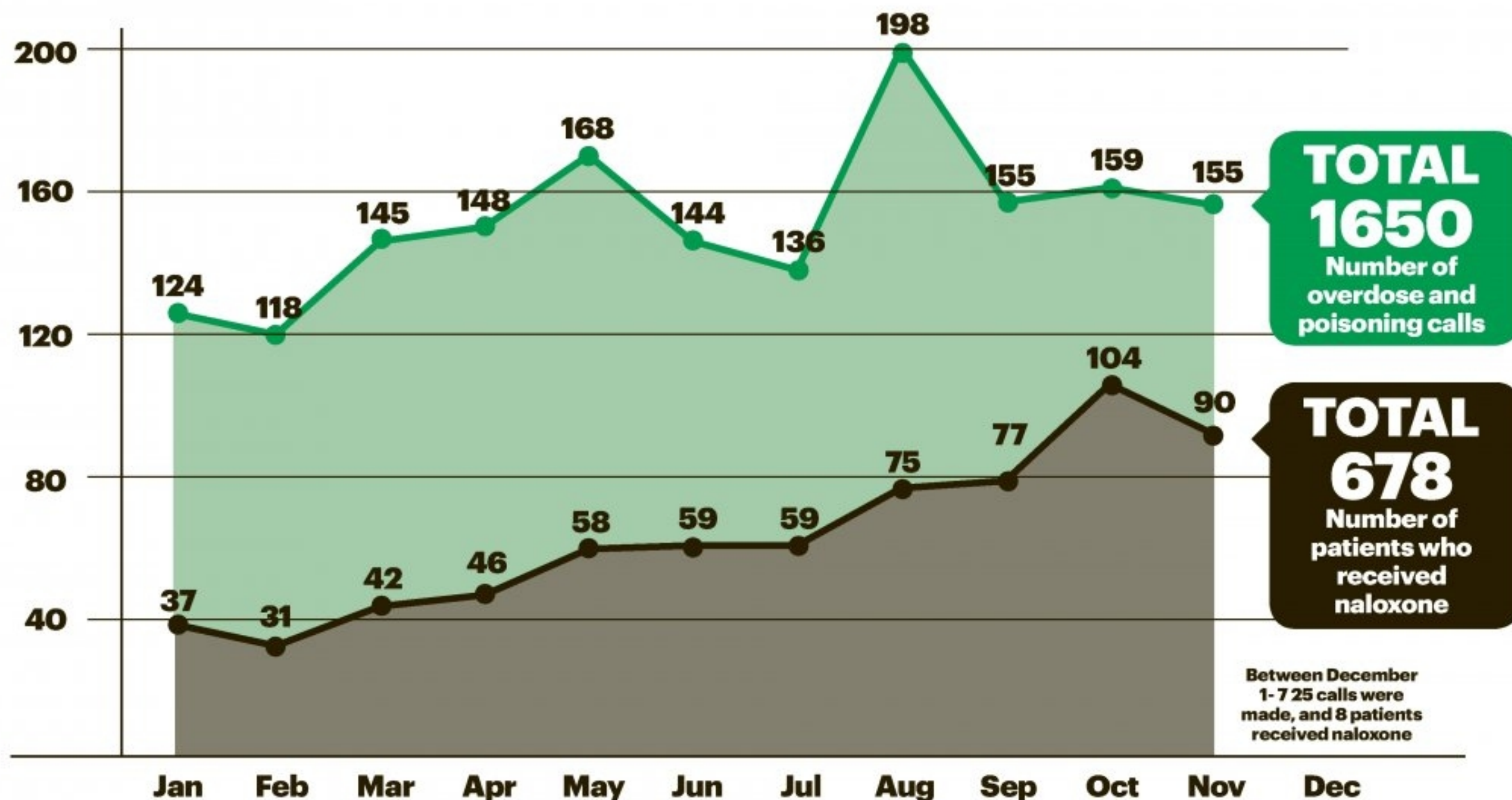


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By the numbers | Overdose and poisoning, and naloxone patients 2016



Overdoses on rise in Manitoba

HARM REDUCTION

No plans for supervised injection sites: Health minister



Stephanie Taylor
Metro | Winnipeg

Manitoba's decision-makers have a long road ahead before they can say whether supervised injection sites will help prevent overdoses and potentially save lives.

That's according to Shelley Marshall, a clinical nurse specialist with Street Connections, an organization that practises harm reducing by distributing needles and syringes to users.

This week, the federal government announced a series of legislative changes that would

make it easier for supervised injection sites to open.

Marshall said there are clear benefits to opening supervised injection sites in some areas like Vancouver's downtown eastside, where there is a dense population of people who use drugs in a specific area that is frequented by first responders.

"In Winnipeg our situation's a little different," she said, explaining there is far less outdoor drug use and no distinct neigh-

bourhood where people live, or gather, to use.

"That's not to say supervised consumption services wouldn't be helpful, but it doesn't seem like one right in any particular neighbourhood is the answer because we don't even really know the problem."

She believes that a working group needs to be established in order to collect evidence on how people use drugs in our city before determining where — and

even if — a supervised consumption site is needed.

Despite the changes, the province's Health Minister currently has no plans to explore supervised injection sites.

"There is no evidence at this time that supervised injection sites would be a relevant harm reduction solution for the province and consequently, there are no plans in place to create such sites," Amy McGuinness, a spokesperson for the Health Minister,

wrote in an email to Metro.

James Favel, co-founder of the Bear Clan Patrol, believes more needs to be done immediately and fully believes our city needs a supervised injection site.

That's why Favel plans to approach the group's board with an idea to convert a shipping container into a moveable space where drug users could inject, or others experiencing homelessness could take shelter from the cold.



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POLICE

Downtown patrols expanded

Keila DePape
For Metro | Winnipeg

Winnipeg police are putting more pairs of boots on the ground downtown in an effort to tackle "crime and disorder" in the neighbourhood.

Police announced that about 200 officers have been trained to work under the new safety strategy, called Centreline, on Thursday.

"This is a real concerted effort to focus in on some of the crime and disorder that typically occur or are reported downtown," said Insp. Jim Anderson at a press conference in Manitoba Hydro Place.

"We want to attack that in a more confined area."

Insp. Anderson says the program won't cut into existing resources because the force's community support unit has a dedicated foot patrol sub-unit tasked with monitoring areas

within Centreline boundaries.

To define the boundaries, the WPS considered crime rates, population density, location of major bus routes, and proximity to venues where large crowds tend to gather, said Anderson.

Police also conducted a citizen survey in September 2015, which indicated the perception of safety isn't at all where it should be, according to Insp. Anderson.

"What people are most concerned about is disorder, nuisance types of events, public intoxication, harassment, as well as crime. Those are all things that we need to address."

In the latest Winnipeg Police General Survey, 91 per cent of women said they felt unsafe walking alone downtown after dark.

With women's safety on the agenda, the WPS has incorpor-

ated The United Nation's Safe Cities Global Initiative into Centreline's basic principles.

Winnipeg is the first city in North America to adopt this UN initiative to reduce and prevent sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces.

Centreline was developed through consultations with various organizations, including Downtown BIZ.

91%

Women surveyed who said they felt unsafe walking alone downtown after dark.

"For the last five years, the trends have been going in the right direction. We're happy to see that crime has been lessening over the years. The big issue is the perception of

safety," said Shawn Matthews, manager of safety and development at Downtown BIZ.

Stefano Grande, executive director of the Downtown BIZ, pointed out another changing trend — a growing number of people downtown.

"There are almost 100,000 people who live, work, and learn downtown. It's becoming more of a 24-hour, vibrant community. The new safety strategy reflects the needs of the downtown today," said Grande.

"For the last five years ... crime has been lessening over the years. The big issue is the perception of safety." Shawn Matthews



A UK-based company has bought Winnipeg-based SkipTheDishes for \$110 million. CONTRIBUTED

SkipTheDishes sold

ONLINE FOOD DELIVERY

Move grants Just Eat access to Western Canada market



Stephanie Taylor
Metro | Winnipeg

350,000 active customers, so the deal will help with Just Eat's plan to be the market-leader in online food delivery in Canada.

SkipTheDishes operates in 14 Canadian cities, mostly in Western Canada, and six cities in the U.S. Midwest.

According to the news release, Canada's growing online food delivery market is worth about \$2.5 billion a year and SkipTheDishes is expected to generate revenue of \$23.5 million this year.

The deal is expected to be completed Thursday.

"This is a hugely exciting day for SkipTheDishes," said CEO and co-founder Joshua Simair.

"By joining forces with Just Eat, we are bringing together two business models which will leave the combined business well-positioned to address the Canadian online food delivery market's unique characteristics

and unlock its considerable unrealized potential."

Last December, the Manitoba government gave SkipTheDishes more than \$5 million to create jobs in Winnipeg.

Earlier this year, the Saskatchewan government gave the company \$3 million over three years as a training subsidy to create jobs in Saskatoon. SkipTheDishes was expected to grow its office Saskatoon office by up to 300 employees from its current 20.

The move was controversial because the Saskatchewan Party government and Premier Brad Wall have repeatedly said they don't choose winners and losers in the economy.

But in November, it was revealed that the company didn't meet conditions to hire employees and acquire space in Saskatchewan, so the first cheque was never cashed and the government cancelled it.

SkipTheDishes, an online food delivery company founded in Saskatoon and headquartered in Winnipeg, is being sold to a company in England.

The London-based Just Eat says in a news release that it's buying SkipTheDishes for C\$110 million, to be primarily funded from existing cash resources.

Just Eat says SkipTheDishes has a selection of more than 2,900 unique restaurants and

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Centre seeks leaky roof funds

CHARITY

Thunderbird House to host fundraising dinner



Braeden Jones
Metro | Winnipeg

A great house in Winnipeg built on cornerstone values of loving, sharing and healing has a growing hole in its iconic, winged roof.

Friends of Pinaysiwiigamic, the non-profit indigenous cultural and spiritual centre also known as the "Circle of Life Thunderbird House," say they "foresee this hole becoming a real problem sooner rather than later."

Michael Redhead Champagne, a spokesperson for Thunderbird House, said local contractors and architects have done their best to do interim "patchwork" on the copper roof, but a greater repair is necessary.

"It simply won't hold up, we know that," he said.

That's why next week, aligning with the winter solstice, volunteers are hosting a special fundraising dinner with a double serving of charity.

Champagne said it's been "difficult to ask for money," because Thunderbird House, despite being involved in the stewardship of a community's spirituality, doesn't "operate as a traditional church."

"We don't have people paying in a basket every Sunday," he said.

So in order to stay true to its values while fundraising, not only will the fundraiser's attendees be helping Thunderbird House's cause, but they'll also be asked to participate in helping to feed less fortunate community members.

"We welcome, of course, their financial contributions, but also want to welcome their hands and their hearts," Champagne said.

He explained that Thunderbird House's location, in close

proximity to homeless services, makes it ideal for the cause.

"We are going to be making sure those who are outside get fed, they'll be fed first, and then we'll feed the people who have come for the fundraiser," he said.

The evening will also include an art auction, with the work of Aaron Paquette, Daphne Odjig, Randy Ducharme and others.

In addition to being a fundraiser, Champagne said he hopes it's also a night that helps forge new relationships, potentially with "those in the corporate community or with the financial capacity" to help Thunderbird House have sustainable operating funding moving forward.

The fundraiser, dubbed "Reborn under the Solstice Moon," will take place Wednesday at 715 Main St.

A separate GoFundMe crowdfunding campaign has also been launched.

“

It simply won't hold up, we know that.

Michael Redhead Champagne



Contractors and architects have done their best to do interim "patchwork" on the copper roof, but a greater repair is necessary. METRO FILE

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5 THINGS TO DO IN WINNIPEG THIS WEEKEND

Planning to wrap up your holiday shopping this week? Or looking for excuses to put it off? There's plenty of local events for planners and procrastinators, alike. **Michelle Bailey** FOR METRO



CONTRIBUTED

1 Shakespeare with a twist

Fans of the Winnipeg based indie band Royal Canoe need no longer wait to experience Am I Not King The Last Concert of Richard II. This retelling of William Shakespeare's Richard II takes place at the West End Cultural Centre, 586 Ellice Avenue and features original songs inspired by this theatrical classic. Show times are 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Dec. 16 and 17, and 2 p.m. Sunday Dec. 18. Tickets are \$20 and available at the WECC or online at www.zone41.ca/tickets



CONTRIBUTED

2 'Lighten up'

Learn how holiday lights, trees and decorations have evolved from the 1880s to now along with the history of electrical development in our province. All that Glows: Then and Now can be experienced at Manitoba Hydro's electrical museum, 680 Harrow St. Sat. Dec. 17 from 1 to 4 p.m. Admission is free, but visitors can purchase vintage-inspired miniature sock monkeys with proceeds going to the United Way. Call 204-360-7905 for more info.



FACEBOOK

3 Get crafty in West Winnipeg

It's getting down to the wire if you're looking to buy homemade holiday gifts. But don't panic just yet. The West Etsy Market takes place Sat. Dec. 17 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the St. James Civic Centre, 2055 Ness Ave., and features vendors offering soaps, leather goods, art, jewelry, vintage housewares and much more. Admission is \$2, kids 12 and under can attend for free and there is free admission for all after 4 p.m.



CREATIVE COMMONS/WIKIMEDIA

4 It's time to lace up your skates

Baby, it's cold outside. The good news? The frigid temps means outdoor skating rinks are opening up, including the canopy rink at The Forks. Don't have skates? No problem. Ice skate rentals are available from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily in the Tower Atrium inside The Forks Market. And, if you are a group looking to book the rink for some winter fun, call Roy at 204-257-0288 or 204-253-7600.

5 Hop up to a pop-up in Exchange

Enjoy fresh coffee and croissants as you browse through the Luckygirl Pop-Up Shop. Doors open at 10 a.m. and close at 7 p.m. on Saturday, December 17. Admission is \$4 with a portion of the proceeds going toward the Bear Clan Patrol and Drag the Red. 300 Ross Ave. is where you can search for that perfect gift made right here in The 'Peg.



CREATIVE COMMONS/WIKIMEDIA



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Family believed dead in house fire

ONTARIO

First Nation community struggling with the loss

A father, three young children and a baby are believed to have died in a fire that destroyed their home and ripped apart this First Nation community amid efforts Thursday to recover and identify the charred remains of the victims.

Shocked community leaders and residents struggled to come to terms with the devastating loss that occurred about 12 hours after a blaze in Port Colborne, Ont., also claimed the lives of four family members.

"We've only started to understand what has happened," Ran-



Fire officials attend the scene of a house fire on Oneida Nation of the Thames reserve on Thursday. THE CANADIAN PRESS

dall Phillips, chief of the Oneida Nation of the Thames, said Thursday. "Our community is suffering. There's not a person in this community that doesn't know one of the victims or the victims' family."

Relatives of the dead were in shock, and heart-broken, Phillips said, adding that a forensic an-

thropologist had only managed to identify the remains of the adult and one of the children.

A man who said he was a brother of the deceased father shooed photographers from the blackened frame of the house on the edge of the town as firefighters and investigators worked in the wreckage of the home.

Firefighters arriving on the scene in frigid temperatures at about 11 a.m. Wednesday could do little more than douse the flames, which took about two hours. The cause remained under investigation.

Phillips, who said the two-storey home was old and "just basically kindling," lashed out at the federal government for rejecting the community's plea for funding to upgrade 50 of its houses, saying First Nations housing is in crisis.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

METRO EXPLAINS

What the asbestos ban means



May Warren
Metro | Toronto

On Thursday the federal government announced a plan to ban manufacturing any products containing asbestos, and its import or export by 2018.

Metro breaks down the news and what it means for you.

What is it?

Asbestos refers to a group of minerals that, at its peak, was found in more than 3,000 applications around the world.

Why is it dangerous?

The World Health Organization declared asbestos a "human carcinogen" way back in 1987. Even small amounts of airborne asbestos fibres can cause lung cancer and a disease called asbestosis.

So there's a ban, yay us?

Canada is late to the game on the issue. Our last asbestos mine closed in 2011, but more than 50 nations have already banned the carcinogen. The government's move comes after decades of lobbying from labour groups, and people who have died or lost loved ones.

What else?

The government pledges to create new health and safety regulations to limit contact workers have with existing asbestos on the job, and expand the on-line list of buildings containing asbestos that it owns or rents.

Lucky Luna survives train hit



Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Luna the dog is dog-gone lucky.

The precocious pup, an Australian shepherd-border collie mix, was hit by a GO train Dec. 7 in Toronto, Ont. Despite being pulled under the vehicle, she survived unscathed.

"It's a miracle," Luna's owner, Ayla Reznick, said. "I can't even imagine my life without Luna right now."

Luna slipped her leash while out for a walk in Parkdale. The dog walker tried to pursue her, Reznick said, but the pooch bolted.

Aided by members of the Lost and Found Pets of Ontario Facebook group, Reznick scoured



Ayla Reznick with Luna, who survived after being hit by a train in Toronto. EDUARDO LIMA/METRO

the neighbourhood but didn't find Luna.

Luna eventually returned home on her own, and aside from a few mysterious scrapes and bruises, she was no worse

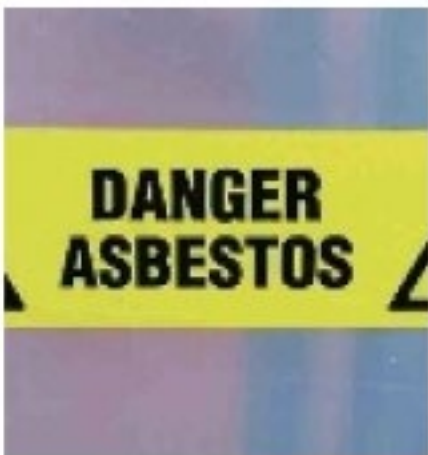
for wear. She was given a clean bill of health from the vet the following day, Reznick said.

It wasn't until later that Reznick learned Luna's brief adventure nearly cost the dog her life.

A GO train operator named Jonathan Podzyhun reached out to her on Facebook, saying he was on board when the train hit a dog matching Luna's description. He was certain the dog had died.

"He was shocked and amazed that she was alright," Reznick said.

According to Reznick, Podzyhun told her the newer GO trains are a bit higher than older models, which could explain how Luna escaped harm. He also suspected a backpack the dog was wearing might have protected her.



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We ignore dual realities at our peril

Rosemary Westwood relocates from Canada to the U.S. She chronicles her observations in a weekly column for Metro.

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD
From the U.S.

For a minute there, it appeared as if the only star president-elect Donald Trump could scrounge up to sing at his inauguration was the runner-up in 2010's America's Got Talent, Jackie Evancho.

Not exactly in keeping with the Trump Hotel motto "Never Settle."

And it felt so right. Who could possibly want to serenade into power the most dangerous president elected in my lifetime? Who could want to sing those myth-making lyrics "land of the free" to a man in favour of voter suppression and media suppression, deporting an entire religion and jailing innocents, a man who takes his leadership cues from Vladimir Putin, who lies to his supporters in order to cement his own power?

The answer, it turns out, is Andrea Bocelli. I'll never hear



Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli performs in Budapest, Hungary on Nov. 5. Bocelli has been confirmed as a performer at president-elect Donald Trump's inauguration. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

that duet with Celine Dion the same way again.

It's still a bit gratifying to know that most of Hollywood, whose opinions I care little about otherwise, is MIA on this one.

Of course, Donald Trump's own celebrity has never really translated into widespread

celebrity political love. (Aside from Kanye West's less-than-gushing support, Alec, the lesser of the Baldwins, and the actress from Clueless who wasn't Cher or Tai.)

But the lack of Hollywood support certainly didn't bother Trump's base, who seem to view celebrities (minus Trump

himself) as de facto "elites" (a term now devoid of meaning, since it also appears to apply to every New Yorker, including nearly half of the city that's living in or near poverty).

Indeed, some might not care who sings about "the rockets' red glare" this time. What looks bad from where

I'm sitting, clearly, looks completely different to someone who voted for Trump.

That acceptance — not really of a post-fact world, but perhaps a dual-reality world — comes with a few requirements.

The first is to remember that while I'm rolling my

eyes at reports in the Daily Beast that Trump wanted Aretha Franklin to sing for him (Aretha?!), some of Trump's 46 per cent of the U.S. electorate are reading on Breitbart that President Obama's investigation into Russian hacking is just sour grapes after the Democrats lost the election.

There are two American realities, and we ignore the one we're not living in at our own peril.

Which brings us to the other requirement: Anyone outraged at the election results has some studying to do. Go read Fox News. Browse Red State. Click on a few Breitbart links. Even, God forbid, peruse Info Wars.

The day after the election, On The Media's Brooke Gladstone argued the radio show — which reports on the media — has a new goal: "To make what seems to have been invisible to us and everyone we know, visible."

It's a worthy goal for us all.

East Aleppo's residents flee

Evacuation seals the fate of rebels' key stronghold

Weeping, hobbling on crutches or dragging suitcases, hundreds of survivors of a devastating government bombardment and siege left the last sliver of opposition-held Aleppo on Thursday, an evacuation that sealed the end of the rebellion's most important stronghold and was a watershed moment in Syria's five-year-old civil war.

A smiling President Bashar Assad called it a historic event comparable to the birth of Christ and the revelation of the Qur'an.

A UN official described it as "a black chapter in the history of international relations."

Under a surrender deal brokered by Russia and Turkey, tens of thousands of residents and rebel fighters are being evacuated to opposition-controlled areas in the surrounding countryside.

Eastern Aleppo rose in revolt against Assad in 2012 and battled since then with the western, government-held part of the city in one of the most horrific and destructive fronts of the civil war.



Syrians evacuate to west Aleppo. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The rebels' hold in Syria's one-time commercial powerhouse was a major point of pride, and at times it seemed an invulner-

able part of what was once a growing opposition-held patch of territory in the north.

But government forces finally surrounded eastern Aleppo and then battered it to pieces. The air and ground campaign by Syrian troops — backed by Russian warplanes and forces from Assad's regional allies — relentlessly wore away at the enclave.

Hundreds of civilians were killed, and tens of thousands fled to government-held areas.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VOICES OF THE DISPLACED

As they find safety, displaced residents from the devastated east of the city describe violence and food shortages to the UNHCR.

We had a house, but it was completely destroyed. It was very shocking to see our home turned to ruins. Bader, 12,

I am very scared of what the future might hold for us, and especially for my daughters.

Aziza, a single mother in her late thirties

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Employee benefits going to the dogs

SERVICES

Store looks to make fancy pet food part of company plans

Trish Donnelly has worked under celebrated Toronto chef Jamie Kennedy and helmed trendy spots from Oyster Boy on Queen St. W. to Mildred's Temple Kitchen in Liberty Village.

These days the executive chef with the perfect pedigree is making a dog's breakfast on Queen St. E. — and loving it.

As top chef of the new, high-end and healthy pet food store Tom&Sawyer, she still puts her considerable chops to good use, whipping up restaurant quality dishes like sous vide salmon, tuna with sweet potato and Italian beef pasta for a less lippy, if not more yappy, clientele.

"My friends weren't surprised when they found out. They said, 'Well, you like dogs more than people anyway,'" she says with



Kristin Matthews and Peter Zakarow, with dog Sawyer, are owners and co-founders of the Tom&Sawyer.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

a giggle.

Of course, making gourmet grub in a shiny, open kitchen that looks like something you'd see at a top-notch establishment doesn't come cheap (some meals are priced at \$11 a pop.) So owners Kristin Matthews and Peter Zakarow have partnered with digital upstart League to get the fancy food onto some

employee benefit plans.

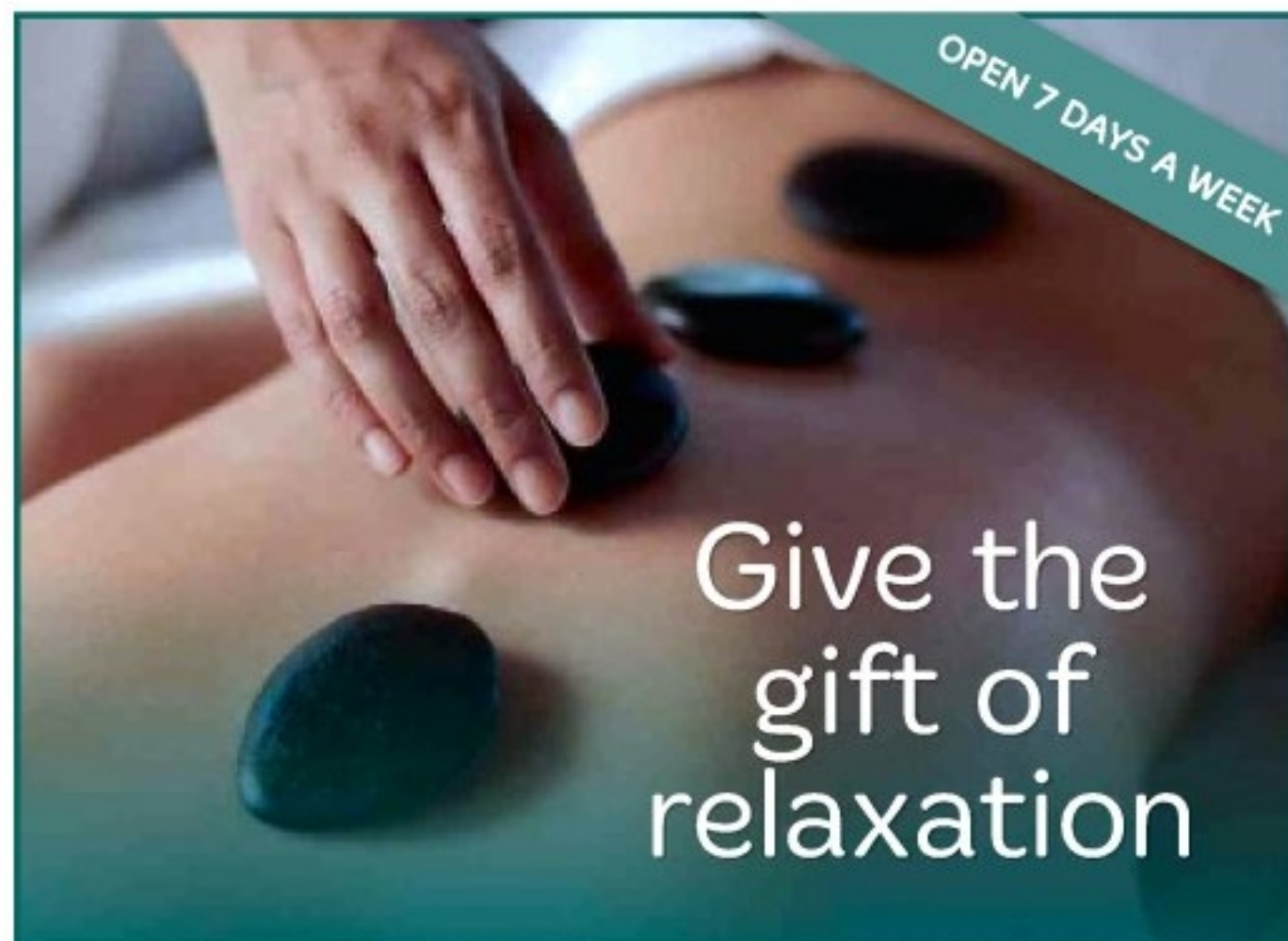
League's digital platform, accessed through an app, provides companies with health spending accounts, lifestyle spending accounts and workplace health services for employees.

"We are aware that pets are a huge part of people's lives — especially for millennials," says League founder and CEO Michael Serbinis.

"This is a driving reason why League is investigating pet-related services and products in our health marketplace," he says, noting he's expecting to see good traction from clients for the off-beat offering.

Most big insurance companies like Sun Life and Manulife offer flexible benefit packages to employees that provide tax-free services such as physiotherapy and massage therapy. Lifestyle or wellness spending accounts also offer workers taxable benefits such as gym memberships and nutritional supplements — but healthy pet food is pretty new to the mix, he says.

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THIS IS AN ACTUAL DINOSAUR TAIL

A Chinese scientist browsing a market in Myanmar has stumbled onto **the find of the century**. What first appeared to be a fragment of a bird's tail suspended in 99-million-year old amber in fact belongs to a coelurosaur — a feathered, sparrow-sized dinosaur. **But what is amber and where does it get its enchanting ability to capture an ancient moment and freeze it in time?**



Fair feather find

Using microscopes and a CT scanner, scientists at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum were the first to ever see dinosaur feathers in glorious 3D. They're white and brown, and more delicately structured than modern bird feathers, lacking the strong central rod.

As a result, this dino probably couldn't fly: a clue feathers may have first evolved for a purpose other than flight. Unlike in birds, the tail's vertebrae were not fused into one bone, but segmented and able to bend in several places at once.



Who was this dinosaur?

A pocket-sized member of the T. rex's family, **coelurosauria**. It walked upright and feasted on insects.

Sorry, Jurassic Park fans, scientists are pretty sure **dino DNA can't survive in amber**. Earlier experiments that suggested this was possible seem to have picked up stray DNA from the lab.

Amber starts out as sticky tree resin. Over many years, a series of chemical reactions turns hardened resin into glassy amber. Smelly, reactive chemicals, called volatiles, dissipate, and the rings of hydrogen and carbon that remain arrange themselves into long chains of molecules called polymers. Once the volatiles are gone and the **polymerization** is complete, the resin, sometimes with debris or dead critters trapped inside, is amber.

FINDINGS

Your week in science



SUMUKHA J. N.

MAGIC MENAGERIE

Scientists have christened a new species *Eriovixia gryffindori*. It's a spider that looks remarkably like the Hogwarts sorting hat.

SOUND SMART

NOMENCLATURE

DEFINITION

Nomenclature is a scientific system for naming and categorizing something, like chemical compounds, animals or time periods.

USE IT IN A SENTENCE

We should adopt formal **nomenclature** for Pokemon. Their names are cutesy and random; they don't provide any useful information.

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That first flash of the Force...

IN FOCUS

A long time ago, in a galaxy not too far away, we were all wowed

Richard Crouse

For Metro Canada



February 3, 1959 and February 9, 1964. The day the music died and the date it was reborn on the Ed Sullivan Show, both days burned into the collective memories of pop culture fanatics everywhere.

But what about May 25, 1977? If you were a teenager then chances are you felt the earth shift. It was the day Star Wars opened, kicking off a cultural phenomenon that continues to this day.

This weekend the universe George Lucas unleashed in 1977 grows to include *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. Much-anticipated, the movie is the first of the standalone Star Wars Anthology films and is expected to decimate the competition, *Death Star* style.

Expect line-ups and packed theatres — box office seers estimate it could pull in somewhere between \$130 million to \$150 million at the U.S. box office this week — but no matter how wild the weekend gets, nothing will match the pandemonium that greeted Star Wars in May, 1977.

To paint a picture of the first blush of Star Wars mania I asked my Facebookers what they remember about that moment a long time ago, in a galaxy (not so) far, far away...

"I remember being so in awe of that legendary opening scene with the giant spaceship coming into picture from the top and filling up the entire screen... oooo, aaaaah," wrote Glenda Fordham. "The audience gasped in unison."

"Upon leaving the theatre, with my little mind totally blown, I was interviewed by the news," recollected Lesley Mitchell-Clarke, "where I think that I said, 'Anything is now possible cinematically.' I was all of 19."

"My stepbrother, who was seven at the time, was dead set against seeing it," says Tina Cooper, "and then of course saw it at least 50 times and dressed in Star Wars gear and played with Star Wars toys every single day for the rest of his childhood."

"The line-up went right around the block and we ended up sitting in the front row of the balcony," recalled Chris Ball. "I was mesmerized but dad was

bored. Part way through I guess he decided he might as well get comfortable. He took his jacket off and in the process knocked his popcorn over the balcony railing. We got a stern lecture from the manager and almost got thrown out. Fast forward 20 years (1997) and I am now the manager of the same theatre and handing out those stern lectures."

"I was six," remembered Sue Edworthy. "My Dad took me to see it. I fell asleep halfway through. He took me to see it again. I fell asleep halfway through. The seventh time, I finally saw the whole thing. Clearly he had no problem seeing it again, and again, and again."

"It was the first film that I went to more than once in its initial run," said Adrian Gruff. "In the scene where the X-Wings enter the Death Star's trench, I disengaged from the screen just so I could watch everyone's heads do the sideways bob and twist that mine had done on first viewing."

"It was the first time that I had a true inkling as to the energy that religion refers to as 'God.'"



MOVIE RATINGS by Richard Crouse

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story ★★★★★
Collateral Beauty ★

HOW RATING WORKS
★★★★★ SEE IT
★★★★ WORTHWHILE
★★★ UP TO YOU
★★ SKIP IT
★

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Rogue One: A Star Wars Story will give another new generation that trademark thrill of facing up to the Force for the very first time. CONTRIBUTED



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In *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, British-Pakistani actor Riz Ahmed plays Bodhi Rook, a former Imperial pilot who takes his technical skills across to the Rebel Alliance. CONTRIBUTED





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INTERVIEW

Riz Ahmed says he was a troublemaker on Star Wars set

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada



Like a lot of kids Riz Ahmed liked Star Wars. Unlike most kids he grew up to be part of the franchise, playing pilot Bodhi Rook in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*.

"I was a fan," says Ahmed, also known as Riz MC, who earlier this year starred in HBO's *The Night Of*. "I remember watching the films the first time round with my older brother. I was about six or seven years old. They were kind of my only memory of watching any movie at all. They left a massive impact on me. I remember running around with my brother for years, acting out our own weird sci-fi stories. Even though I didn't understand the storyline – I was too young – the level of imagination and detail that went into those movies.... It made an impression."

Yet, while the originals left an impression on the younger Ahmed, it was only when he joined the universe himself that he realized his level of fandom might not have been quite at the level he had thought.

"It's only now that I have

met real Star Wars fans that I realize I wasn't really a fan," he says. "I thought I was. Star Wars fans are dedicated, loyal fans. I think the kind of vibe I've gotten so far is that they are really excited to see a film that both preserves the legacy and the inheritance of the Star Wars saga but is also something a little different, fresh, distinctive and separate from the other films. I think that can be a really tricky balance to achieve but I think they have really done that."

Rogue One is the first standalone Star Wars Anthology film — upcoming movies in the expanded cinematic universe will focus on Han Solo and Boba Fett — and takes place after the formation of the Galactic Empire, shortly before the events of Episode IV: *A New Hope*.

The Rebel Alliance has recruited former criminal Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones) to collaborate with a team to retrieve the blueprints of the Death Star, the Empire's armoured battle station capable of destroying entire planets.

Ahmed plays a recruit, a former Imperial pilot with strong

technical skills. Producer Kathleen Kennedy calls the character "a troublemaker."

"It is interesting she calls Bodhi Rook a troublemaker," Ahmed laughs. "I sometimes wonder if she is talking about me on the film set. Bodhi is somebody who is thrust into a really unfamiliar set of circumstances. He is just an Imperial cargo pilot, an average Joe trying to earn a living. It is a company town he lives in, the occupied planet of Jedha, so he works for the Empire. He's really thrust into a new set of circumstances that force him to reconsider his allegiances and what he's doing in these turbulent times."

Working beside Ahmed are Diego Luna, Donnie Yen and Forest Whitaker, making *Rogue One* the most diverse of all the Star Wars films.

"I think it just makes sense that our film reflects the society around us," says the British Pakistani actor, "and also the audience watching the films. A story like Star Wars is a global story. It belongs to all of us."

"Audiences around the world are excited about Star Wars so it makes sense that when they think about who might be the best actors for these roles they cast their net really wide all around the world. 'Yeah, we'll have Ben Mendelsohn from Australia, Forest Whitaker from L.A. and Mads Mikkelsen from over here.' I'm lucky to have been caught up in this net as well."



It's only now that I have met real Star Wars fans that I realize I wasn't really a fan.

Riz Ahmed

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Black queer stories hit mainstream



Actor Ashton Sanders plays one of three stages of Chiron, the focus of *Moonlight*. CONTRIBUTED

ANALYSIS

Coming-of-age story explores issue rarely seen in mainstream

Neil Armstrong
For Torstar News Service

The acclaimed drama *Moonlight* has become a leading awards contender this season, giving hope for diversity in the year after #OscarsSoWhite.

But the story it tells, of a young black man slowly coming to terms with his homosexuality, is one rarely seen in mainstream culture — until recently that is. On film, on television and on-stage, there seems to be a sudden convergence of art forms telling the stories of black queer people, especially males.

Moonlight joins the similarly themed 2015 indie film *Blackbird*, plus the hip-hop drama *Empire* on Fox, which introduced a gay love interest for Jussie Smollett's character Jamal earlier this year, and the complicated, di-

verse LGBTQ characters of *Orange Is the New Black*.

Onstage in Toronto, black queer characters were front and centre in productions this year including *Secrets of a Black Boy*, *How Black Mothers Say I Love You* and, notably, in *Black Boys*, a "timely exploration of queer male blackness" that just ended a run at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.

Are these productions part of a "black queer renaissance" as some have called it?

In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* before *Moonlight* had its first public screening at the Telluride Film Festival, director Barry Jenkins said, "This movie was made for anybody who has ever felt other or like they can't be themselves and be accepted in society."

Compared to now, in the '90s such content was almost nonexistent.

There were exceptions, such as Jeffrey Wright's portrayal of the title artist in the 1996 movie *Basquiat*, and Queen Latifah's portrayal of a very proud lesbian in *Set It Off*.

And then there was Will Smith's intriguing yet problematic lead in the 1993 movie *Six*

Degrees of Separation (played onstage by Courtney B. Vance).

At the time there was some controversy over Smith's portrayal of a gay character — a lying, promiscuous one at that — and what it might mean for his career. If anything, it helped.

Fast forward to now and Les Fabian Brathwaite of *Out Magazine* writes: "For the first time since perhaps the Harlem Renaissance, the souls of queer black folk have been depicted on our own terms as we take control of our narratives. . . This is the new renaissance."

Thomas Olajide, one of the stars of *Black Boys*, thinks it's a matter of serendipity to have a play he and his co-creators had been working on for four years come out at the same time that *Moonlight* is picking up award season buzz, including six Golden Globe nominations this week.

"It just seems like it's the climate for these stories to be unearthing very naturally," he says. "Perhaps we're all reaching a level of fatigue with not hearing those stories."

His co-star, Stephen Jackman-Torkoff, says "it's not just males but a lot of female queer people of colour (who) are really driv-

ing" the surge of such stories, at least on Toronto stages.

"Our communities have always existed," says playwright d'bi young anitafrika (*She Mami Wata & The Pussy Witch Hunt*). "Whose visibility validates this idea of a renaissance?"

Having worked in the arts for 20 years, she notes, "What I can say is I do see a change in the visibility of black queerness in more dominant public spaces."

But Kimahli Powell, who directed *Secrets of a Black Boy* and sits on the board of the Inside Out LGBT Film Festival, says we shouldn't expect this supposed renaissance to continue.

"No doubt that *Moonlight* is a seminal work and its breakthrough is important," he says. "Yet when these moments happen — and they have in the past — we hope Hollywood has embraced storytelling and yet things remain the same."

"#OscarsSoWhite was just last year."

In terms of queer cinema, Powell notes people thought *Brokeback Mountain* would open doors for more movies representing LGBT people. That was a decade ago and little has changed.

COLLATERAL BEAUTY

Will Smith channeled grief

Will Smith had already begun researching his role for *Collateral Beauty* when he learned that his father was terminally ill.

Smith said at the film's world premiere in New York on Monday that he had to channel the emotions of that tragic news into a demanding film role. Smith's father, Willard Carroll Smith Jr., died on Nov. 7.

"My father was diagnosed and given six weeks, so you know, to be hit with that in the process and then what we decided to do was just use the preparation of the character to actually deal with what my father was experiencing," Smith said. "It became our way of saying goodbye, essentially. It was a really beautiful confluence of art and life."

Smith stars in the film as a father who suffers a great tragedy and begins to question the point of existence.

"It is such a beautiful concept. It's a guy that experiences a loss and gets furious at the universe, and writes these letters to Love, Time and Death, and his mind is so twisted that he mails the letters. And then, Love, Time and Death respond. You know, it's that beautiful Christmas twist to it, but dealing with real issues," Smith said.



Will Smith as Howard and Jacob Latimore as Raffi in *Collateral Beauty*. CONTRIBUTED

The film also stars Helen Mirren in the role of Death. She admitted to loving the script, and felt it shared the same vibe as Christmas classics like *It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Christmas Carol*.

"There was something very, very true in the centre of it. And kind of as a Christmas movie, you know it's kind of a pretty cool Christmas gift of a movie," Mirren said.

Edward Norton, who plays Smith's best friend and partner in the film, also said he saw a

strong similarity with the film to holiday classics like *It's a Wonderful Life*.

"They straddle this very difficult balance between, obviously being very heart-winning and heart-warming and hopeful. But if you think about it, they touch on very dark and difficult things. Jimmy Stewart is in such despair he's going to a bridge to jump, right? But somehow they manage to be about deep and important things, while also being a lot of fun," Norton said.

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Death, love and grief are all part of the process

FILM DEVELOPMENT

Star-studded cast opened up script to improvement

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada



Edward Norton, director David Frankel and Will Smith behind the scenes on the set of drama *Collateral Beauty*. BARRY WETCHER

Collateral Beauty had a long Hollywood history before director David Frankel came on board. Hugh Jackman was attached at one point and Rachel McAdams had been approached to play a part.

The long development came to an end when Will Smith signed on to play Howard Inlet, a charismatic advertising kingpin who becomes despondent after the death of his six-year-old daughter.

"When I came on it, it felt like it was written in stone," says Frankel. "Everybody loved the screenplay and we were going in three months and then people started whispering, 'I wish we could fix that.'"

"Once the actors got involved,

Professor Will Smith, Professor Edward Norton and Professor Kate Winslet, there was a lot more writing. Mostly condensing. Edward had this brilliant vision of the movie as a screwball comedy, which I think was really smart. Will always said, 'We have to make the first half of the movie as funny as possible so that we don't kill people.' We worked on that."

The changes continued into the shooting. In the story Howard spends his nights practising self-therapy, writing angry let-

ters to the abstractions of Time, Love and Death demanding answers as to why his child was taken. In the original script he met the abstractions, personified by Jacob Latimore, Keira Knightley and Helen Mirren, in a different order than in the finished film.

"It was written where he first ran into Love, then Time then Death," says Frankel. "We shot them in the order, Death, Time, Love so as we were approaching Love Will and I were still arguing about whether Love

should be first or last in the sequence.

"We had prepped for six months up to that moment thinking Love was first. He came to me the day before and said, 'I think Love should be last.' I fought him tooth and nail about it because I really thought that moment on the train when he confronts Death was the pivotal moment and then it rained and because of the weather (the shots) wouldn't have matched. The sequence wouldn't have made sense.

"Of course Will said, 'God works in mysterious ways.' But Will Smith got his way. Big surprise."

The movie details the anguish Howard feels and the steps his friends take to help him reconnect with the world.

"I have seen some pretty profound grief," says Frankel. "My wife lost her mom six years ago and grief really can distort someone's connection to the universe. I learned you don't just get over it. That's why the line Helen (Mirren) has, I think is the most profound line in the movie. 'Nothing is really ever dead if you look at it right.'"



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Join a cult

Not all iconic movies were box-office blockbusters when they were first released. Sometimes it takes a mixture of luck, patience, finding the right audience and big changes in the industry before a film really takes off. Here are four movies that earned cult status against all odds:

The Rocky Horror Picture Show

(1975): Though the stage musical it was based on was a sensation, the movie flopped twice before it became part of the midnight movie craze of the late '70s. Midnight screenings, lax distribution rules, and audience participation went on to make it the longest-running release in film history.



CONTRIBUTED BY HOLLYWOOD SUITE

And Now For Something Completely Different

(1971): Independently financed by a Playboy executive who was certain Monty Python's Flying Circus could be repackaged for American audiences, this movie proved to be a dud on its initial release. However, once the Monty Python TV show was broadcast on PBS in its original format, the film was re-released to great financial and cultural success among fans eager for more.

Attack of the Killer Tomatoes (1978): This schlock horror parody recouped its modest budget, but was critically panned and didn't make any real box office waves. That is until younger audiences discovered the home video release. The film's second life on video-store shelves generated enough buzz to justify the filming of sequels a decade later, and videogame and cartoon spinoffs in the '90s.

Heavy Metal (1981): This Canadian classic had a respectable box office draw for an animated sci-fi fantasy film based on a counter-culture magazine, but that success was eclipsed by a soundtrack album full of massive '80s rock hits. The popularity of the soundtrack was nearly solely responsible for the film's cult status, since music licensing issues kept it from home video for over a decade, only allowing it to be seen occasionally on TV, or as a midnight movie in theatres.

Rediscover some of the most beloved cult films of all time. The Hollywood Suite Free Preview is on now until Jan. 5. Enjoy the best movies of the '70s, '80s, '90s and 2000s uncut and commercial-free on four HDTV channels and On Demand, available on most TV providers.

See all these films on Hollywood Suite this month. Catch a cult film triple bill of *And Now For Something Completely Different*, *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Dec. 17 on the Hollywood Suite '70s Movies channel and ring in the new year with *Heavy Metal* on the Hollywood Suite '80s Movies channel Dec. 31. Learn more at hollywoodsuite.ca/freepreview.

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metro SPECIAL REPORT: HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Splurge or thrift for ideal gifts

Spend big or spend small, two shopping experts reveal their secrets to finding the perfect present for everyone on your list

Jacqueline Kovacs

A self-confessed holiday shopping splurger, Loukia Zigoumis, the Ottawa-based lifestyle blogger and shopping and travel expert on CTV Morning Live, starts her gift list in November. "I like to ask for ideas from the people I'm shopping for to narrow down my choices," said Zigoumis, "but I also love surprising my loved ones with unexpected gifts."

That often means gifts with big price tags. "There are definitely items I think you should splurge on," said Zigoumis, "sunglasses, handbags and electronics, as well as travel." But she adds that her splurge items are well thought out — key to not blowing the bank over the holidays. Here's how Zigoumis manages to be a big spender on a budget.

Shop early — really early
Don't think of the day after Christmas as Boxing Day. Think of it as the first day of holiday shopping for next year. As Zigoumis points out, you may groan now, but your wallet will thank you later. "After the holidays is a great time to shop for big-ticket items," she said, "whether it's designer goods or electronics as many items will be drastically reduced." Make a note of what you've bought in your personal calendar and then hide it in a spot that you won't forget, she adds.

Make it a long-term investment
Consider splashing out on one "main" gift and keeping any



Lifestyle blogger Loukia Zigoumis. JON NICHOLLS

other peripheral gifts small, especially if you have older children. "My boys, now 11 and 8 years old, received iPads a couple of years ago as their main gift," said Zigoumis. "They were great investments as they use them for fun and when they travel. It makes sense to splurge on gifts for loved ones that you know they will love and will last a long time." For herself, Zigoumis says the one big-ticket gift she'd like would be a Louis Vuitton bag. "Designer handbags last forever and the price is easily justified because you know it's going to be used almost daily for years."

Take one for the team
Instead of individual gifts — and the associated shopping time — for each member of your family, consider a big

group gift you'd all enjoy. "Perhaps you want to take your family on a tropical vacation during the winter," said Zigoumis. "Maybe everyone's gift can be the plane ticket in a beach bag, along with beach essentials." On the flip side, you could draw names and attach a big budget for the one gift you're getting for just one person.

The trappings of wealth
Even inexpensive gifts can put on pricey airs if the packaging is on the luxe side. "I am big on gift-wrapping presents nicely," said Zigoumis. "One of my favourite things to shop for is gift wrap, ribbons and bows." Those less than skilled at wrapping can take advantage of gift-wrap services within malls and department stores. No one even has to know.



Style expert Karl Lohnes. AARON HARRIS

If you want to buy brand-new, top-quality holiday gifts and decor, you'll need to take Karl Lohnes' approach — shop year-round. "In order to be a thrifty shopper of any sort, you have to be willing to shop out of season," said Lohnes, style expert with Toronto's CHUM FM radio. Need a new artificial Christmas tree? Wait till mid-January. "You'll save at least 60 to 70 per cent of what you'd pay in November," said Lohnes. And the same applies to gifts. "Pick up a beautiful cashmere sweater for half price in February and put it away for next year for your loved one," he added.

Great advice, but what if like many of us, you've just realized that you haven't given a thought to holiday shopping? Fear not: Lohnes has thoughtful, creative gift ideas up

his thrifty sleeve.

Go cheap or go home
Embrace your inner penny-pincher, encourage family or friends to do the same, and take on what Lohnes and his friends call "the cheapie challenge."

"You have to shop at a Value Village ... or a second-hand store," he explained, "and you have to find a gift for each person — but leave the price tag on to prove you paid so low." Then, go to town on the wrapping and await each big, cheap reveal.

"You open them up and go, 'An alabaster ashtray from the 1970s!' But actually, it's really cool and — oh my gosh, just \$2.99!" At the end of the gathering, decide who was able to give a gift with the most style at the lowest price.

It's make or bake time

We all know people who are exception bakers, sewers and crafters — and what better way to give a thoughtful, affordable gift than to give something you've made?

"To bake somebody something can really mean so much to them — especially if they're not a baker," Lohnes said. "If they're not a knitter, make them a simple scarf. These days, we are all so busy, so it's a thoughtful thing to do."

A little experience goes a long way

Who says a gift has to be a physical object? Sometimes the most welcome present is providing someone your time and service. For example, Lohnes says, you could make a gift certificate offering to walk a loved one's dog for four Saturday mornings so they can sleep in. Or offer to help clean the house of an older parent or friend. Same with a promise to give a manicure or take them shopping — whatever service you know your loved one might need.

The point, says Lohnes, is to think differently about holiday presents. "I think that gift-giving has become overwhelming for most people," he said. "There's so much choice and I think we need to put certain challenges into it — turn gifting into experiences. It doesn't mean that you're poor, but it's the idea that there's more thought put into it."

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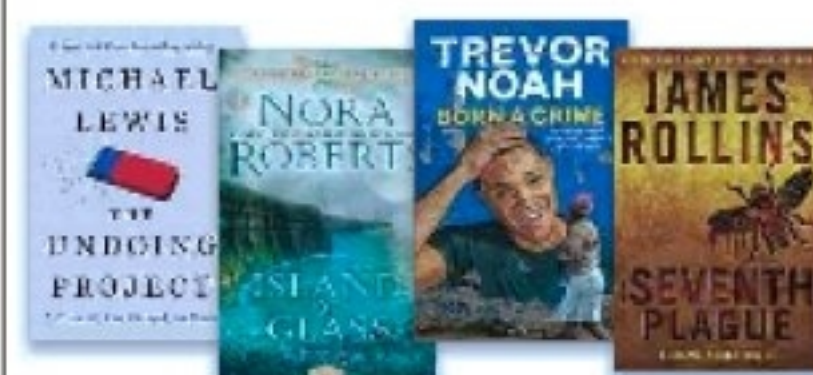


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Be a wine aficionado this season

Peter Rockwell

With more wines in the world than needles on a Christmas tree, choosing the perfect bottle for those on your holiday gift list can be a challenge.

To simplify your shopping here are 10 tasty wines that will appeal to everyone from the burgeoning aficionado whose just getting into wine to the trendiest person you know.

For the wine newbie

Anciano 2007 '7 Year Old' Tempranillo (Spain, \$12.95-\$14.99): Relaxed and ready-to-drink, this Spaniard is one of the oldest reds on store shelves that's still in everyone's price range. Classically labeled and encased in an old-school gold wire wrap, it's all about mature berry fruit which makes it a perfect out of the box selection for turkey dinners.

Inception 2015 Irresistible White (South Africa, \$13.95-\$14.99): With a Garden of Eden-themed label this white looks sexy and tastes pretty much

along the same lines. Big on stone fruit and up-front tropical flavours, it ends surprisingly dry, making it an all-around people pleaser.

Apothic 2014 Inferno (USA, \$15.99-\$20.99): This latest "limited release" in the ever growing Apothic family spends two months in charred, white oak whiskey barrels before being bottled. Though the booze is upfront and personal in the berry-rich aroma and flavour, it mellows itself out when the wine is chilled in the fridge for 10-15 minutes.

For the white wine fan

Kim Crawford 2016 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc Holiday Edition (New Zealand, \$18.99-\$22.99): For wine fans, Sauvignon Blanc is as synonymous with New Zealand as sheep and the All Blacks. Kim Crawford's version from Marlborough is arguably the quintessential example, with its gooseberry fruit and zippy acidity wrapped in gold for the holidays.

ford's version from Marlborough is arguably the quintessential example, with its gooseberry fruit and zippy acidity wrapped in gold for the holidays.

Marques de Casa Concha 2014 Chardonnay (Chile, \$19.95-\$23.99): No longer the popularity powerhouse it once was,

Chardonnay still holds a place in many hearts, and is proudly served up on holiday tables. This balanced mix of bright fruit and massaging oak has "match with turkey" written all over the label.

For the red wine fan

Meiomi 2014 Pinot Noir (USA, \$25.99-\$29.99): One for those

who love a fruit bomb that revels in its not-so-subtle, thick berry flavours. The grapes come from three different regions in California, combining to create a flowing fruit trail that tastes as good on its own as it will with poultry and ham.

Fontanafredda 2011 Barolo DOCG (Italy, \$29.95-\$36.79):

While Piedmont may lack Tuscany's sex appeal, its juice, especially what's squeezed from the vineyards around the village of Barolo, are considered wine royalty. Brooding and rustic with layers of Old World personality, Fontanafredda's Barolo is a great introduction to liquid aristocracy.

For the fizz fan

Santa Margherita Valdobbadiene Prosecco Superiore DOCG (Italy, \$18.95-\$21.99): Prosecco is so red hot it has made sparkling wine cool. Best known for its sublime Pinot Grigio, Santa Margherita's

spin on this northern Italian sparkler is all about accessible drinkability highlighted by apple and peach aromas and a zesty citrus flavour trail.

Veuve Clicquot Brut Champagne (France, \$63.99-\$72.29): Orange in label and classic in champagne goodness, this Pinot Noir-based bubbly loves to get decked out for the season. This year, it's housed in an arrow tin indicating the distance to Champagne from 29 locations. Look for Montréal; it's the only Canadian city with a shout-out.

For the hipster

Gonzalez Byass Tio Pepe Extra Dry Fino Sherry (Spain, \$17.95-\$22.99): Everything old is new again and sherry, long the tippie of "mature" drinkers, is having a bit of a moment with both mixologists and millennial-aged wine aficionados. Bone dry and best served cold, this fino is surprising food-friendly and will stay fresh for over a week if refrigerated.

Prices reflect the range across the country. Some products may not be available in all locations.



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Tasteful gifts for foodies in your life

GOOD EATING

That perfect something for the home chefs on that gift list

Vicky Sanderson

Sure it's better to give to than to receive. It's also true that splurging on a gift for your favourite home cook could be an investment in good eating. Here are a few items that might serve the amateur chef and gift-giver equally well.

Blenders don't always get the respect they deserve as small-footprint appliances that do everything from blend soups to make mayonnaise to chop nuts and herbs.

Chefs, who are also connoisseurs of mid-century or small-space design, might like one from Smeg, the Italian manufacturer of compact, curved countertop appliances in a rainbow of colours. A Smeg blender, in a cheery seasonal red, is available at Lowe's, lowes.ca, for \$349.

Brand new this year is Panasonic's Countertop Induction Oven, which uses induction and infrared heating to create what has been described as a toaster oven on steroids. There's almost no preheat time; in minutes, it's up to 450°F. That's hot enough to grill whole fish quickly with a crisp skin and flaky, moist interior. A one-pan chicken and veg meal can be done in about 20 minutes.

The non-stick pan that must be used with it is dishwasher safe, and each unit comes with a cookbook of recipes developed by the Culinary Institute of America. Available at major retailers and on Panasonic's eStore, the manufacturer's suggested price is \$700.

Home chefs who already love Le Creuset's line of enameled cast-iron wear might covet the Dutch Oven in a zippy Tartan pattern exclusive to Williams Sonoma, williams-sonoma.com, for \$550. Purists who insist on solids will be better pleased with exclusive grey, white or dark blue options. (Psst: A more affordable idea is a simple cast iron pan, a favourite of many chefs. Walmart sells a Lodge 6.5-inch pan for \$1.)

Fresh herbs take any dish from average to outstanding. They are much easier to incor-

porate if the kitchen includes a unit from AeroGarden, which makes economically-sized indoor garden kits with full-spectrum grow lights and hydroponic, soil-free containers. Recent sale prices at aerogarden.com began at about \$100.

The slow cooker has long been loved by home cooks. It's perfect for anything that benefits from lengthy cooking at low temperature, such as stews, stocks and cheaper cuts of meat. It also does soups, yogurt, pudding, grain dishes, and jams.

There are lots of versions of this versatile cookware, but the granddaddy of them all, Crock-Pot, has a clever new design twist. The Multi CrockPot comes with a 2.5- split, a four-, and a six- quart crock. When not in use, they nest for compact storage. About \$100 from Bed Bath & Beyond, bedbathandbeyond.ca.

A vacuum packer is a very efficient way to preserve food. So a chef can buy larger amounts of perishable foods, such as cheese, when it's on sale and/or available and use it reliably for a couple of months to come. It also seals make-ahead meals for road or camping trips, and busy weeknights.

Hamilton Beach has come out with NutriFresh, a vacuum sealer with settings for moist, dry and delicate foods, which are sealed in bags made of refillable, BPA-free plastic rolls. About \$130 at multiple retailers and online at hamiltonbeach.ca.



Le Creuset's Dutch Oven in Tartan. LE CREUSET

Adventurous chefs will want to try the sealer to cook sous-vide, in which vacuum-sealed food cooks under gently circulating water at very low, very precise temperatures for a very long time — 24 hours or more. The advantages are virtually no volume loss, and excellent texture; the long, slow cooking apparently also makes magic out of tougher cuts of meat.

To do it, the cook will also need something like the Nomiku immersion circulator. About the size of a hand blender, it clips on to any pot, and handles the temp and circulation. It sells for



Güde Chef's Knife. LEE VALLEY TOOLS

\$549 from Nella, nellaonline.com. Look for other, perhaps less expensive brands, at Amazon.ca.

Good knives are the foundation to a functioning kitchen. Knife nerds would be delighted to receive the Güde Chef's Knife from Lee Valley Tools, leevalley.com.

A large, deeply curved blade is supposed to give the chef exceptional control, enhancing those much-coveted "knife skills". This 12 1/4-inch knife weighs 450 grams (just less than a pound of butter) has a full-tang handle made of African Blackwood, and sells for \$429.

Looking for more affordable

options, or stocking stuffers for a beginner? If the chef doesn't already have one, consider a mandolin, the low-tech way to quickly slice and shred large volumes. Find one for as little as \$26 at Hudson's Bay, thebay.com.

If you're still stuck on what to give the cook in your life, while sticking to your budget, consider these:

Other inexpensive items loved and used by chefs include extra serving spoons, a ladle in a new size, a shiny metal pie plate, some simple glass ramekins, or even a few fresh tea towels — which you will use, of course, to do the dishes.

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The best apps to save you money while shopping

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For great deals, load up your phone with these freebies

Marc Saltzman

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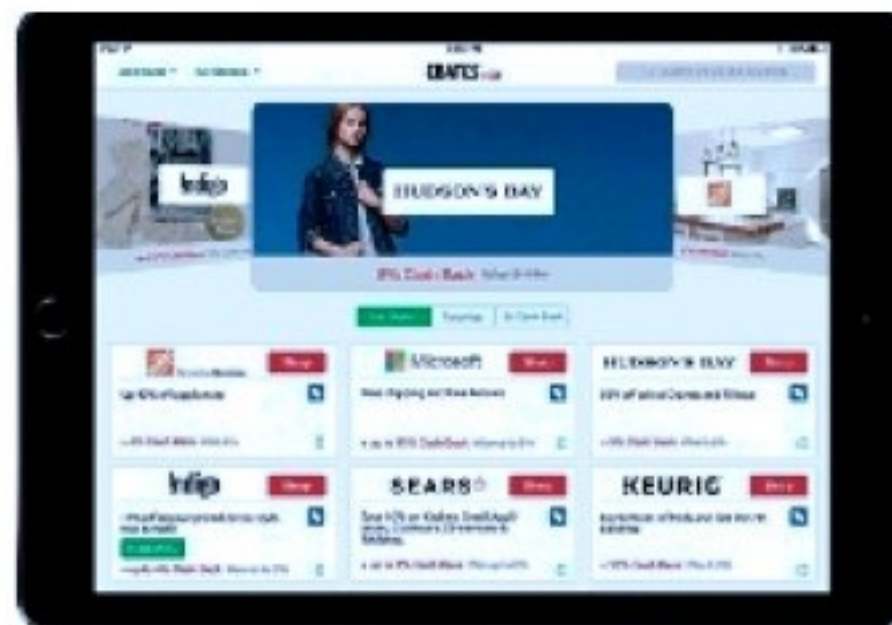
This is especially true over the holidays, when you're looking to buy gifts for family, friends, and coworkers.

The good news is there are many free downloads from your favourite app store — such as Google Play for Android devices or App Store for iPhone and iPad — that can each help take some weight off your wallet.

Whether shopping online or at retail, the following are a few of my favourites.

Flipp

Consider it the ultimate flyer and coupon app. Available for iOS and Android devices, Flipp lets you use your fingertip to flip through retailers that matter to you — whether it's a supermarket, big-box electronics store, clothing chain, home-decor outlet, and so on — and you'll be able to see the latest flyers that showcase new products and sales around you. Tap items to virtually clip them into your shopping list. Tap



Ebates offers a website as well as an app. CONTRIBUTED

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Ebates.ca

Saving money is great, but what if you could make money, too? That's the concept behind Ebates.ca, an app and website that pays you cash back every time you shop online through participating retailers — and there are many. Sign up for a free account, and then every time you shop at one of the supported stores or marketplaces — like Amazon.ca, The Gap, Hudson's Bay, eBay, Staples, Microsoft Store, Groupon, and Old Navy, to name a few — you'll start earning

sive deals, as well as sales and coupons, too.

Kijiji

While you can often find a great deal at online marketplaces like eBay, you'll have to wait for shipping — and the last thing you want is getting a gift into your loved one's hands in January. Instead, online classifieds sites like Kijiji — which is owned by eBay — lets you buy, sell and trade locally with people, with cash, and you'd be surprised how many new items there are available to wrap as holiday presents. Plus, with

Kijiji, you don't have to bid on auction items as you do sometimes on eBay, though there is often room to haggle for those who like to do so. If you're meeting someone to buy a product, try to arrange to do so in a public place, during the day, just to err on the side of caution.

RedFlagDeals

Like its popular website, which caters to 2.5 million monthly readers (says the Yellow Pages-owned company),

the RedFlag-

Deals app sniffs out the best bargains for Canadian shoppers. Featuring retail offers, coupons, flyers, featured items, news and tips, it's all curated by "deal hunters" and wrapped in a clean and easy-to-navigate interface. You can also choose to see deals by mall or store — if you know where you're heading, that is — or browse around by category, search by keyboard, or participate in a forum to engage with hundreds of thousands of other Canadian shoppers.

View all the latest flyers from Canada's top retailers



The RedFlagDeals app. CONTRIBUTED

cash that can be sent to you via cheque, deposited into a PayPal account, or in the form of an Amazon.ca electronic gift card. Each store offers a different cash-back percentage, typically ranging from 2 to 5 per cent. Ebates says stores pay them a fee when you shop and Ebates share a portion of the fee with you. The app also offers exclu-



The Flipp flyer and coupon app. CONTRIBUTED



Online classified app Kijiji. CONTRIBUTED

Learn a thing or two on teacher gifts

CLASS IN SESSION

Here are some bright ideas straight from the source

Astrid Van Den Broek

When it comes to giving teachers memorable gifts for the holidays, you know the cranberry-and-cinnamon-scented candle you gave your child's Grade 2 teacher probably didn't make her list of favourite gifts ever.

So what do teachers prefer to receive? Any hints on how to pick the perfect gift for your child's equally perfect teacher? Here are four to

give us the scoop on their favourite presents.

Alyssa Greenberg
Grade 7/8 French Immersion teacher
École Stanley Knowles School, Winnipeg

"One of my students once presented me with a concert ticket for an artist we both really liked," said Greenberg. "The card included a message from her indicating that she had the other ticket and really wanted to enjoy the concert with me. Though it was a bit unconventional — I don't know many students who want to hang out with their teachers outside of school — this was really a memorable experience for me."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "It's always nice for students to notice teacher's interests and choose a gift card that would suit their needs," said Greenberg. For example, Greenberg's students have picked up the fact that she's a baker (she often bakes for her students at Christmas). "So I've often received baking supplies and small kitchen gadgets that

have been put to good use."

Heather Webb Makin
Teacher/Librarian
Eastview Public School, Toronto

"As crazy as it sounds, one of the best and unexpected gifts was a cocktail blender. I was teaching Kindergarten at the time and there were just some days I could have used it during the school year," said Webb Makin. "I now use it for cocktails in the summer, as well as smoothies throughout the school year. I totally didn't know I needed one until I got it."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "Most teachers, as you know, buy a ton of supplies for their own classrooms, maybe consider gift certificates at Staples or Dollarama," said Webb Makin.

"These would be used immediately and the teacher would be forever grateful for that gift. As well, if you know the teacher has a class iPad or An-

droid device to use in the classroom, a gift card to buy an app would not only help the teacher, but most likely your child in the long run."

Jennifer Sepetdjian
Grade 2 teacher
On a teaching exchange at Glendal Primary School, Glen Waverley, Australia

"When I left my fabulous Grade 1 class in Canada back in December 2015, I got the best gift," said Sepetdjian.

"The class parents and students put together a video of the kids answering questions about me and passing on some wise advice for my year away. It was eight minutes and 30 seconds of complete gratitude. I had to watch it again at home that night as I had missed so much of it that afternoon for all the tears in my eyes. I've never felt so appreciated in my 16 years of teaching."

Gift giving cheat sheet:

"I suggest parents get their child to choose what to purchase. Those kids know that Mrs. A loves coffee, that Ms. J loves to travel or that Mr. D loves to garden and they will be so excited to present the gift to their teacher," said Sepetdjian. "If not, something from a local restaurant, gift card to a shopping centre, tickets to the movies, books for the class, time at the 'pick an item and paint it' kind of shop and there isn't anything wrong with the LCBO (liquor store)!"

Miranda Tonery
Grade 9 teacher
St. Francis of Assisi Middle School, Red Deer, Alta.

"The best gifts have been the ones that came from the heart. There was a parent who was very creative, and she made Christmas balls with the initials of every member of the family each on their own ornament," said Tonery.

"I also had student paint a silhouette picture of my family in a sunset on a canvas."

+ GIFT IDEAS

- 1. Desk Set**
HomeSense, \$24.99
- 2. Buffalo Plaid Scarf**
Winners, \$24.99
- 3. L'Occitane Shea Butter Ultra Rich Body Lotion**
Amazon.ca, \$39
- 4. Metal Lunch Tins**
HomeSense, \$14.99 each
- 5. Tree Line Photo Pillow Cover**
Indigo, Indigo.ca, \$39.50
- 6. Corkcicle Tumbler - Copper**
Indigo, Indigo.ca, \$38
- 7. S'well Marble 17oz Insulated Water bottle**
Indigo, Indigo.ca, \$45
- 8. Picture Frame**
Marshalls, \$12.99
- 9. Superman 1,000 Piece Jigsaw Puzzle**
Marshalls, \$9.99
- 10. Porcelain Teapot**
HomeSense, \$19.99

Gift giving cheat sheet: "The best gifts have been the ones that came from the heart. However, large group gifts of a spa day is always nice as well."



PICTURE FRAME, MARSHALLS



CORKCICLE TUMBLER - COPPER, INDIGO.CA



PORCELAIN TEAPOT, HOMESENSE



BUFFALO PLAID SCARF, WINNERS

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It's time to spoil your furry friends

PAW-PULAR IDEAS

Pets know it's the holidays, so don't forget their presents

Ylva Van Buuren

Have a four-legged friend on your gift list this year? While the usual chew toys would be well received, why not use the holidays as an excuse to get something different, fun, and functional. Here's a 2016 gift guide for pets.



Wrap up the **Sniffany & Co Small Box Squeak Toy**. The plush turquoise and white dog toy has got its own bow and a squeaker for hours of stylish fun. \$24 at [Shop Overstock Canada](http://ShopOverstockCanada.ca); shopoverstockcanada.ca.

If your cat is a wanderer, use the **Nuzzle GPS Collar**. The pet tracking device uses GPS and includes a free Nuzzle app (no monthly or annual subscription fees either) that alerts you of location. The collar also provides access to emergency contacts and medical history records. The waterproof collar weighs just one ounce and is available in orange and purple. (Dogs can wear one too). \$189 at Hellonuzzle.com.



Show you care with a glass **Magnet Set**, \$6.99 at [HomeSense](http://HomeSense.ca). Visit homesense.ca for store locator.



Use the festive 10-foot **Retractable Leash** to take your best friend for a walk this holiday season. \$12.99 at [Winners](http://Winners.ca). Visit winners.ca for store locator.

Fill the **Silhouette Treat Jar** with dog treats, and wrap it up for your best friend. \$19.97 at [Walmart](http://Walmart.ca); walmart.ca.



Amuse and exercise your cat with the **Smartykat Feather Whirl Electronic Toy**. The spinning feathers and unpredictable movements will keep Miss Kitty on her toes. \$14.97 at [Walmart](http://Walmart.ca); walmart.ca.



WOOF and MEOW Expression Frames are 4"x6" with matte black finish frames with silver-embossed



words and an easel back. Wipe clean with a soft dry cloth. \$19.50/each at [Indigo](http://Indigo.ca) stores, Indigo.ca.



Personalize this 9" x 16" **Customizable Stocking** with a favourite picture, cherished quote and your dog's name! It's made from red and green plaid polyester, has a sturdy loop for hanging, and is machine-washable. \$40.25 at zazzle.ca.



DanaZoo Crimson Bone Stay-on Mat with Bowls uses magnetic technology to help stop bowls from sloshing around while the dog eats and drinks—and making a mess. The 18" x 11" mat wipes clean, and bowls

are dishwasher safe. \$24.99 at Sears.ca.

Use the micro-fiber **Wet Pet Mat** to help keep floors clean when your pet comes in with wet or dirty paws. The 20" x 31" mat soaks up to seven times its weight in water and mud. A silicone undercoating eliminates skidding. The DanaZoo Wet Pet Mat costs \$21.99 at Sears.ca.



The Umbra Fishhotel is an ultra modern fish bowl with glass inner bowl that is removable for cleaning with a white plastic outer shell. The 7½" x 7½" 'fish bowls' can be stacked to create a hotel effect. US\$40 from umbra.com.



Here's a great way to exercise—for you and your dog.



The **FitBark Wireless Dog Activity Monitor** tracks your dog's activity and health. The light weight monitor is eight grams and fits dogs of any size. It comes with rechargeable batteries, free apps and no monthly fees, in five different colours. \$129.95 at [Indigo](http://Indigo.ca) stores, Indigo.ca.

Put a bow on this adorable **Bavarian Catnip Filled Owl**. The spelt filling provides a natural cushion, and guarantees lots of fun. No glue is used in the toy, just stitching. \$12.99 at [PetValu](http://PetValu.com) stores; petvalu.com.

Product prices may vary.



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Gear up: New gaming hardware is here

NEW MACHINES

From next-generation consoles to virtual reality, amp up your entertainment

Marc Saltzman

Are you looking to get your game on in 2017? Get your thumbs ready. New versions of popular video game consoles are now available, not to mention cutting-edge virtual reality (VR) headsets to drop you "in" the game.

Expect these hardware platforms to be hot sellers over the holidays as more and more games are playable on them.

Here's a look at what's new and newsworthy.



PS4 Pro

Available for \$499.99, the new and improved PlayStation 4 (PS4) console trumps its three-year-old predecessor. For one, it now supports 4K TVs — those new televisions with four times the resolution of 1080p HD — and offers HDR ("high dynamic range"), which reproduces a wider range of brightness levels, richer colours, and higher contrast levels. Even older games are now "up-scaled" to deliver more breathtakingly detailed graphics. And PS4 Pro also supports apps including Netflix and YouTube, both of which can display 4K video. This new black box also offers a faster processor for faster and smoother frame rates in your games, and the hard drive has doubled, from 500 gigabytes to 1 terabyte, so it can hold more content.

Xbox One S

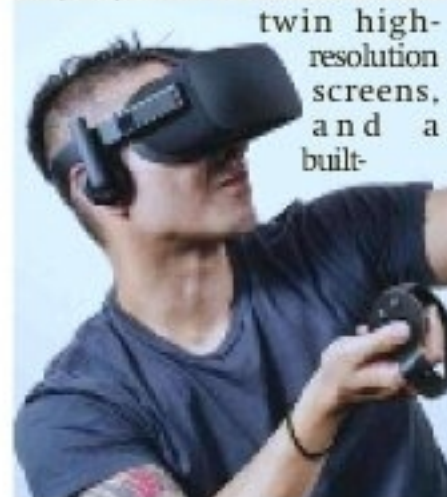
Xbox has also undergone a significant makeover. Xbox One S — the "S" stands for "Slim" —

is smallest and most compact Xbox yet, and also works well with new 4K TVs. In fact, along with supporting 4K games and streaming video services, Xbox One S can also play 4K Blu-ray discs, as well as regular Blu-rays and DVDs (PlayStation 4 Pro plays Blu-ray discs and DVDs, but not 4K discs). You also get 2 terabytes of storage for the price. With a starting price of \$379 (500GB version), Xbox One S offers backward compatibility, therefore you can play a growing number of older Xbox 360 games at no additional cost.

HTC Vive

The most comprehensive solution for virtual reality buffs, HTC Vive (\$1149.99) ships with a comfortable VR headset with

twin high-resolution screens, and a built-



in camera for when you need to see around you; two room-scale base stations that track your movement in a 3-D play space (no, you don't just sit down with HTC Vive); and two wireless controllers that let you interface with content. Speaking of content, the Valve VR store now has more than 700 PC downloads supported by HTC Vive, plus you get two games for free: a fantasy adventure called The Gallery: Call of the Starseed, and the

fast and frantic, Zombie Training Simulator.

Oculus Rift

Purchased by Facebook for \$2 billion dollars — yes, billion with a "b" — Oculus Rift (\$849) also plugs into a compatible personal computer, like HTC Vive, and delivers an immersive 360-degree experience with VR games, movies, educational soft-

ware, and more — including many exclusive titles you won't find anywhere else. Packed up with the headset is a Xbox One controller, but Oculus Touch is now available, for \$279.99 for the pair, for a more engaging interactive entertainment experience. One of the dozens of launch titles for Oculus Rift, Farlands lets gamers explore an uncharted planet and discover new forms of life (including insects, fish and plants), while Lucky's Tale, included, is a fun platforming adventure.

PlayStation VR

Debuting in October, PlayStation VR (\$549.99) works exclusively with the PlayStation 4 video game console for your TV. Set-up is a breeze, as you simply plug the gear into the PS4, mount the PlayStation Camera (\$74.99) just below or above the television, and don the head mounted display (HMD) and earbuds, to be transported to virtual worlds. With a strong focus on gaming, PlayStation VR launched with a lineup of 30 games, including exclusive titles such as Batman: Arkham VR, PlayStation Worlds, Rez In-



finite, DRIVECLUB VR and RIGS Mechanized Combat League.

Samsung Gear VR

Another player is the newly refreshed Samsung Gear VR (\$139.99), which requires one of six compatible Samsung smartphones to experience virtual reality, by popping the phone inside the headset. Supported devices include Samsung Galaxy S6, S6 edge, S6 edge+, Galaxy Note5, Galaxy S7, and Galaxy S7 edge. After you insert your phone, you can run games and apps by touching a small trackpad and buttons on the right of the headset or via an optional Bluetooth controller, if you like.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: XBOX ONE S; SAMSUNG GEAR VR; HTC VIVE; PLAYSTATION VR; OCULUS RIFT; PS4 PRO



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Get your game on with these picks

VIDEO GAMES

Here are some thumb-numbing suggestions

Marc Saltzman

Whether you're into sci-fi shooters, role-playing games, sports simulations or head-scratching puzzlers, 2016 served up a ton of selection and quality for the discerning gamer.

In fact, therein lies the problem: With so many games released each year — for consoles, computers and handheld devices — it can be tricky to know what to buy. If you need some suggestions, the following are some top games of the year, divided into kids, teens and adults, costing \$69.99 apiece unless otherwise specified.

Kids

- Hit the ice with **EA Sports' NHL 17** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One), a fun and frantic hockey sim that delivers the goods. Along



EA Sports' NHL 17. CONTRIBUTED

with playing as or against your favourite NHL team, this disc or download offers more accessible and responsive skating and shooting controls, smarter goaltending, new modes (Draft Champions and World Cup of Hockey), a deep progression system, new animations and stadium art, and better commentary to get you pumped up while you play. NHL 17 is also the most customizable game to date, and features dozens of thrilling new goal celebrations.

- As with its popular predecessors, **Skylanders Imaginators** once again fuses action figures with a video game: simply place the character on the Portal of Power, connected to a game con-

sole, and the character comes alive on the TV screen — but now there's a lot more customization. Along with an all-new story, kids can create their own Skylanders for the first time, by tweaking their in-game appearance, powers, abilities, catch phrases, and more. Available for all major platforms, the \$89.99 Starter Pack includes a couple of characters, magical crystal, sticker sheet, Portal of Power, and the game.

Teens

- Who said all first-person shooters need to be super violent? Rated "Teen," Blizzard's colourful and cartoon-like **Overwatch** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Win-



Naughty Dog's Uncharted. CONTRIBUTED

dows PC) pits two teams against one another in fast-paced, objective-based matches in the future. Featuring a roster of diverse characters — including soldiers, scientists, and adventurers — your team will unleash extraordinary powers, traverse the globe, and even speed up and slow down time. Use strategy, tactics and reflexes to survive the fight.

- If car racing is more your thing, Microsoft Studios' **Forza Horizon 3** is an open-world racing video game that supports cross-platform play between Xbox One and Windows 10 players. Based in Australia, the game is roughly twice as big as Forza Horizon 2, and includes locations such as

Surfers Paradise, Yarra Valley, and the Outback. More than 350 cars are available — the most in a Forza game — and along with various solo and competitive multiplayer modes, Forza Horizon 3 also features a four-player co-operative ("co-op") multiplayer campaign.

- After selling more than 110 million Final Fantasy games since 1987, Square Enix is back with a new installment in the coveted role-playing game series: **Final Fantasy XV** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One) fuses a real-time battle system with memorable characters and a gripping story that tells of Crown Prince Noctis who bands with companions to push back

against an invading army. Many years in development, this epic single-player game features an open-world environment and cinematic graphics.

Adults

- Available for Xbox One, PlayStation 4 and Windows PC, **Electronic Arts' Battlefield 1** challenges you to climb into the boots of a soldier and battle over land, sea and air in a large-scale action game set against the backdrop of The Great War.

Up to 64 players can use WWI-era weapons and vehicles — including massive air ships, battleships, or an armoured train — and experience white-knuckle combat scenarios with dynamic elements to ensure no two battles will be the same.

- Exclusively available for PlayStation 4, **Naughty Dog's Uncharted 4: A Thief's End** once again stars treasure hunter Nathan Drake — and other returning characters — in a large-scale, third-person and action-heavy adventure. Along with tight and responsive controls, this game delivers near photo-realistic graphics, convincing voice-acting, a great story, and many memorable moments.

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Great gadget gift ideas for kids, tweens

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

What to buy the young 'uns? Tech, of course

Astrid Van Den Broek

'Tis the season to buy holiday gifts for the kids and grandkids, and consumer electronics are likely atop of their wish list.

Let's face it: they'd much prefer the three Gs — gadgets, gear, and games — over cardigans with little reindeer on them.

But unless you're tapped into what's hot, you might not know where to start.

If you're shopping for loved ones age six to 12, consider one of the following tech toys, ranging



in price from \$69 to \$799.

Anki OVERDRIVE
Love speed? The Anki OVERDRIVE Starter Kit (\$199.99) fuses furious car racing with robotic battles that plays out on a modular track you build on a floor or table. After you download the free Anki OVERDRIVE app to your Apple iOS or Android device, command and customize your cars with sleek upgrades and battle a bunch of friends or self-controlled robot cars across multiple modes. The Anki Drive Starter Kit includes two physical robot cars and starter track, but kids can add extra Supercars, Supertrucks, and an expansion track, too.

Xbox Design Lab

Why should your video game controller look like everyone else's? Give gamers the gift of personalization and let your kids build a unique Xbox One Wireless Controller. The Xbox Design Lab does just that. Featuring more than eight million combinations, select the desired colour

of the body, bumpers and triggers, D-pad, thumbsticks, ABXY face buttons, and more — for a made-to-order, one-of-a-kind wireless controller you can truly call your own. The cost is \$99.99, while optional engraving is \$14.99. To get going, the website is xboxdesignlab.xbox.com

3Doodler Start

Why draw in boring 'ol 2-D when you can create 3-D works of art? That's the idea behind the 3Doodler Start, an easy-to-use 3-D printing pen that extrudes eco-friendly bioplastic, and lets kids create three-dimensional structures in multiple colours, such as cars, buildings, animals, or even custom smartphone cases. Simply turn on the pen, insert a coloured strand, and then start doodling anything you like in 3-D. For \$79.99, the Essentials Pen Set includes a 3Doodler Start Pen, two packs of 3Doodler Start Eco-



Plastic (48 Strands in eight colours), Micro USB Charging Cable, and 3Doodler Start Activity Guide. At \$119.99, the Super Mega Pen Set includes a

3Doodler Start Pen, eight packs of 3Doodler Start Eco-Plastic, eight Unique DoodleBlocks, Micro USB Charging Cable, and 3Doodler Start Activity Guide.

Air Hogs Helix Sentinel Video Drone

Part of the popular Air Hogs family from Spin Master, the Helix Sentinel Video Drone (\$299.99) is a high-performance quad-copter that houses a high-speed, 60 frames-per-second camera — and you can see what the drone see with the pair of bundled FPV (first-person view) goggles. Plus, all the aerial footage is saved to the removable 4-gigabyte SD card (included), so you can pop it into your computer later to marvel at your flying skills.

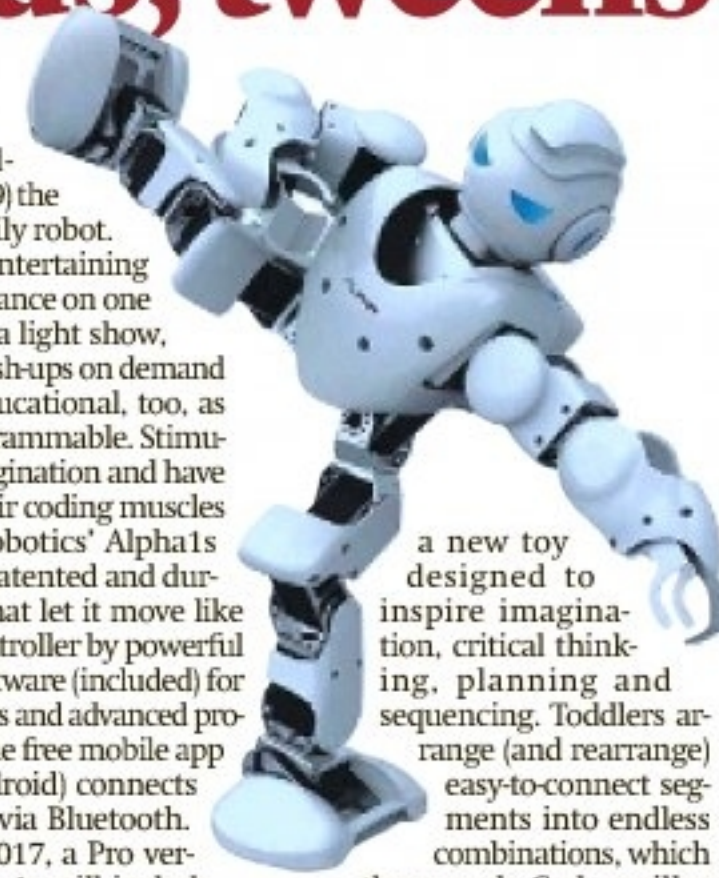


Alpha 1s Robot

Consider Alpha 1s (\$649.99) the ultimate family robot. It's not only entertaining — it could balance on one leg, dance to a light show, or even do push-ups on demand — but it's educational, too, as it's fully programmable. Stimulate kids' imagination and have them flex their coding muscles as Ubtech Robotics' Alpha 1s includes 16 patented and durable servos that let it move like a human, controller by powerful 3-D Visual software (included) for both beginners and advanced programmers. The free mobile app (iOS and Android) connects to the robot via Bluetooth. Due out in 2017, a Pro version of Alpha 1s will include a detachable battery pack and upgraded servos.

Code-a-pillar

Speaking of coding, younger kids — between three and six — will enjoy playing with the Fisher-Price Think & Learn Code-a-pillar (From \$59.99),



a new toy designed to inspire imagination, critical thinking, planning and sequencing. Toddlers arrange (and rearrange) easy-to-connect segments into endless combinations, which then sends Code-a-pillar off on its path. While your little preschooler doesn't realize it, Code-a-pillar is introducing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) at an early age, and making it fun and rewarding.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: AIR HOGS HELIX SENTINEL VIDEO DRONE; XBOX DESIGN LAB; ALPHA 1S ROBOT; CODE-A-PILLAR; ANKI OVERDRIVE; 3DOODLER START

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When it's time to wrap it all up

WITH A BOW

Tips to create presents with personality

Vicky Sanderson

For some folk, it's just not the holidays until there are presents — in shimmering papers and lavishly beribboned — tucked under a tree, stacked on consoles or poking out of a row of stockings.

They'd find a kindred spirit in Jane Means, a UK-based "gift-wrapping guru" who works as a professional gift-wrapper and packaging consultant to such high-end clients as Harrods, American Express, Dior, and members of the British Royal family.

The well-wrapped package, she said, "increases the luxury, the thoughtfulness, the value, of the gift, especially if you wrap according to the personality of the recipient."

Not everyone will appreciate the effort that goes into

the perfectly wrapped gift, admits Means, noting that children are more inclined to rip the paper off the gift than admire the presentation.

"So you use your judgement," she said, "and decide that for that really good girlfriend, you'll add a pretty brooch to the bow." Other distinctive additions she incorporates are feathers, fresh flowers, beads and small ornaments.

Means looked to current fashion and cultural trends to inspire the signature looks she recently designed using product from HomeSense, Winners and Marshalls, where gift wrap rolls start at \$4, packs of 20 gift tags at \$6, wired ribbon at \$7 and a three-pack of toppers at \$5.

Means says good giftwrapping relies on a few essentials. They include two-sided tape and a sharp pair of scissors.



A gift bag from Indigo. INDIGO

tool box.)

She likes to pair luxurious silver and gold metal ribbons with wrap in either white or subtle matching tones, in this case using paper with chunky gold and white stripes with wired ribbon in gold and white. The gift is finished with a sparkly "topper", but Means says a corsage or small brooch would also work nicely.

If you do decide to go for the glitter, look for Seal-it Glitter tape. Its makers promise it doesn't come off in clouds of sparkly dust, and that it sticks to paper, ornaments, glass, and wreaths. It can be torn by hand, and comes in loads of colours, and in fun candy cane and snowflake designs.

It's easy to translate the nature-inspired looks that are big in fashion and home decor to gift wrapping,

says Means. Just think of brown paper packages tied up with string.

If items are to be wrapped in tissue before going in a box, she suggests spraying it with air fragrance, so that there's a subtle perfume when the gift is opened.

Means likes wrapping bulky or awkward items, such as a magazine that might be used when giving a subscription, in a vintage scarf or piece of festive fabric.

To personalize plain ribbon, she writes the recipient's name over and over in a line.

One of the looks she designed featured the recurring "shimmer and shine" holiday theme, heavy on metallic papers, and glittery wired ribbon (another staple in her gift wrap

late the nature-inspired looks that are big in fashion and home decor to gift wrapping, says Means. Just think of brown paper packages tied up with string. It's also budget friendly — a 1,125-foot roll costs \$35 from Staples. To dress the package up, add bits of greenery, fresh or faux.

All-purpose burlap from a home improvement store (Rona sells a three- by 50-foot roll for \$20) can serve as rustic wrap.

If there's any left over, use it as a table runner for a similarly themed holiday dinner table.

Plaids have made their way into the holiday design and packaging mix this year. Means used papers in traditional tartans and trendy moose motifs, paired with plain black string, wired tartan and burlap ribbon, and faux wood gift tags for a "hipster holiday" look.

The checked theme continues over at Indigo where a package of Buffalo check and grey tissue runs about \$4, and gift bags adorned with moose and/or seasonal designs, come at various price points, as do generously sized curl bows.

Tying a tree ornament into the ribbon of a modest gift — say a box of chocolate or fancy piece of soap — adds interest and ensures that the recipient will remember the gesture for years after the product is used up. Canadian Tire is a great source for these kinds of baubles, including glass ornaments in an on-trend plumb shade, that start at about \$5.

For the non-traditionalist, Means gives new meaning to the term "merry and bright" by using papers in hot hues, polka dots, chubby chevron patterns and look-at-me stripes.

For more ideas and inspiration, visit janemeans.com or gift yourself with a copy of her book, Giftwrapped: Practical and Inventive Ideas for All Occasions and Celebrations (\$25 at Indigo).



Norman Printery mid-century wrap. ETSY



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Boutique stays in Tel Aviv

For decades, the tourist landscape in Tel Aviv was dominated by mediocre beachfront hotels. Over the last several years, beautiful boutique properties have changed the city's hospitality scene and contributed to Tel Aviv's increasingly chic image. These accommodations are sleeker, smaller and often-affordable. **SARAH TRELEAVEN/FOR METRO**



MIDTOWN

Brown Beach House

This property is perfect for visitors looking for a hip and affordable small beachside hotel in an increasingly sophisticated part of the city. The giant neon pink flamingo out front and the sunny yellow furnishings set a playful tone. Some rooms have enormous ocean-facing balconies, and all have bright yellow or blue accents. The neighbourhood is ideal for exploring both the south of the city (hipper) and the north (more polished).



ALLENBY AND ROTHCHILD

Hotel Montefiore

The original boutique beachhead is the Montefiore, which opened in 2008 and sits on a quiet side street. The Montefiore is all grace and discretion. The lobby restaurant — a fusion menu offering terrific pork and cabbage gyoza and wonderfully rich truffled goat cheese ravioli — is full of palm fronds and Art Deco light fixtures. The hotel's bedrooms are equally elegant, and in-room libraries offer a great selection of authors.



STEPS FROM ROTHCHILD BOULEVARD

The Norman

The Norman is comprised of two 1920s buildings that still retain their original grandeur. The palette of creams and soft greys is complemented by Bauhaus and Art Deco touches. This 50-room hotel serves Mediterranean and Japanese cuisine, and showcases work by Israeli artists. Further cultural enrichment is provided through bespoke tours, including food tours of the Carmel Market and historic perspectives on Jaffa.



CENTRAL TEL AVIV

The Poli House

Canadian Karim Rashid is the designer responsible for The Poli House — the high-design (pod chairs, neon) new property that opened its doors in November. This stunning boutique hotel was carved out of a 1934 Bauhaus wonder in central Tel Aviv, and is the product of a three-year modernization process that remained loyal to the building's heritage. The focus of this 40-room property is a massive panoramic rooftop space with an infinity pool, cocktail bar and tapas menu. There's also a ground floor "cultural centre," complete with gallery space and design bookstore.



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5 HOTTEST DESTINATIONS FOR TRAVEL IN 2017

Want to travel in the new year, but still not sure exactly where you're headed? Perhaps this list can help. From the in-your backyard destinations to the far, far away, here are some of the world's must-see destinations in 2017.

LOREN CHRISTIE/FOR METRO



1 Portugal

Due to cheap hotel rates and mouth-watering cuisine Portugal has risen to the top of many travellers' lists. Air Transat is increasing its direct flight service from Montreal and Toronto to both Porto and Lisbon and Air Canada Rouge is adding new flights to the Portuguese capital in summer 2017. For foodies, Exodus Travels has launched a collection of guilt-free vacations for people who want to hike, eat and drink their way through Portugal's Douro Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its award-winning wine.



2 Iceland

Thanks to its stunning and varied natural beauty and a series of viral ad campaigns Iceland continues to be a top draw. Research by youth travel operator Contiki has revealed that the most desired travel experience for 18-35 year olds in Canada is to bathe in Iceland's famous Blue Lagoon.



3 Egypt

G Adventures reports an eight percent increase in travellers year over year heading to Egypt. Although numbers aren't what they were pre-revolution, it's a great time to visit some of the world's most historic monuments while avoiding the crowds and helping this former tourism giant get back on its feet.



4 Cambodia

A recent survey by Booking.com ranks Cambodia as a top pick for 2017. The recent discovery of an ancient city below the stunning temple complex of Angkor Wat has further heightened interest among Canadians. Before you go check out *First They Killed My Father*, a biography about the Cambodian genocide.



5 Canada

With the 150th anniversary of Confederation taking place there's never been a better time to explore at home. The epicentre of action will be the nation's capital with more than 150 events planned, but there will be plenty going on elsewhere, with national parks waving entrance fees and Montreal celebrating its 375th.

3 days left!

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Perreault, Jets down Panthers in shootout

NHL Winnipeg snaps 4-game losing streak

Mathieu Perreault scored the winning goal in the sixth round of the shootout to lift the Winnipeg Jets to a 4-3 victory over the Florida Panthers on Thursday.

Perreault did some slow stick-handling with the puck before flipping a forehand shot past Panthers goaltender Roberto Luongo, a goal that ended Winnipeg's four-game losing streak.

Dustin Byfuglien had a goal and an assist with Adam Lowry and Bryan Little also chipping in during regulation for Winnipeg (14-16-3). Connor Hellebuyck made 41 saves in net.

Aleksander Barkov, Reilly Smith and Vincent Trocheck scored a trio of power-play goals in the second period for Florida (13-13-5). Jets defenceman Toby Enstrom was in the penalty box for each one. Smith added an assist.

Luongo made 29 stops for the Panthers.

Florida had a 3-2 lead heading into the third period, but with the teams on a 4-on-4, Little took a cross-ice pass from Blake Wheeler and shot it into the net at 2:36 as Luongo was sliding over from the other side.



Mathieu Perreault of the Jets scores past Panthers goaltender Roberto Luongo in the shootout on Thursday night at MTS Centre. JOHN WOODS/THE CANADIAN PRESS

THURSDAY In Winnipeg

4	3
JETS	PANTHERS

Florida outshot the Jets 42-29 after three periods.

The Jets were being outshot 19-7 in the first when Byfuglien took a pass from rookie Patrik Laine and put

a high shot from the bottom of the circle over Luongo's glove with 11 seconds left in the period.

The Panthers scored the trio of power-play goals as Enstrom was sitting in the penalty box for interference, then holding, then interference again.

Barkov evened the game 1-1 at 4:51 of the second. Jaromir Jagr picked up his 1,129th career assist and 1,884th point on the goal. Jagr is now three

points away from tying Mark Messier (1,887) for second on the NHL's all-time points list.

Smith followed up with his fifth goal of the season at 8:36 to give the Panthers the 2-1 lead, but Lowry put the Jets back in a tie at 10:11 when he banged in a loose puck.

Less than two minutes later, Trocheck made it 3-2 with a shot that went past a screened Hellebuyck at 11:58.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

HOCKEY

Canadian juniors low on star power

Without an obvious star player to carry the pressure and expectations, Canada's team for the world junior hockey championship will be all about teamwork, speed and desire.

The final 22-man roster that emerged from this week's four-day selection camp in Boisbriand, Que., is deep in very good players, such as 2015 third overall NHL draft pick Dylan Strome and Ontario Hockey League scoring leader Taylor Raddysh, but doesn't have a Connor McDavid or a John Tavares to claim the spotlight.

"We want to be a complete team," said coach Dominique Ducharme, the Drummondville Voltigeurs coach and general manager who led the Halifax Mooseheads to the 2013 Memor-



Dylan Strome GETTY IMAGES

ial Cup. "We've got speed, skill. We're reliable. We can defend. We're good at putting pressure on the other team. We want to put all that together."

The heat will be on Canada after a quarter-final elimination from last year's world junior event by host Finland.

And this year the stakes may be higher in Montreal and Toronto, where Canada won gold in two years ago. THE CANADIAN PRESS

IN BRIEF

Major League Soccer plans to expand to 28 teams

Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber announced plans Thursday for the league's expansion to 28 teams, including a deadline for owners to apply and a new franchise fee.

The fee for the two teams expected to be granted next year is jumping to \$150 million. Garber also set a Jan. 31, 2017, deadline for interested potential owners or ownership groups to apply.

The league recently expanded to 22 teams.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NBA sideline reporter Sager dies at 65

Craig Sager, the longtime NBA sideline reporter famous for his flashy suits and probing questions, has died after a battle with cancer, Turner Sports announced Thursday. He was 65.

Turner president David Levy said in a statement Thursday that Sager had died, without saying when or where. Sager worked basketball games for TNT for nearly a quarter-century. He had a third bone marrow transplant in August to fight an aggressive form of leukemia. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



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Messier blown away by Jagr's longevity

NHL

Czech player poised to become 2nd in all-time points

Whether as a flashy rising star or as a battle-tested veteran, Jaromir Jagr has impressed NHL legend Mark Messier for more than a quarter century.

"When (Jagr) came into Pittsburgh he dazzled us with his power and his skill and his overall game," said Messier. "Later on in his career he's kind of inspired us with his passion and dedication. He's played long enough to understand what the game means to him as a person and as a player."

Poised to be overtaken by the 44-year-old Jagr for second on the NHL's all-time points list, Messier reflected Thursday about the Czech superstar's accomplishment in what has become in-



44

Jagr's age. He turns 45 on Feb. 15.

Panthers right-winger Jaromir Jagr had 1,883 NHL points over his career heading into action on Thursday night. STEVE RUSSELL/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

creasingly a young man's game.

"The only way you can play, and do what he's doing right now, is to make sure you are putting in the time for your conditioning and taking care of your-

self," said Messier. "The game has to be the No. 1 priority in your life because it takes a lot of time to prepare each and every game, let alone each and every season."

"You've got to give Jaromir a

lot of credit for what he's been able to do early in his career, and even more credit for how he's been able to sustain himself."

Messier, who passed Gordie Howe's point total of 1,850 for second all-time in his final NHL season back in 2003-04, finished his career with 1,887 points. Jagr grabbed third place from Howe in March and sat at 1,883 points heading into Thursday's game between his Florida Panthers and the Winnipeg Jets.

Wayne Gretzky's all-time mark of 2,857 points isn't going to be equalled by Jagr, or likely anyone else for that matter.

Jagr joined the Pittsburgh Penguins in 1990 and won two Stanley Cups alongside Lemieux. He has gone onto play for seven more NHL franchises, but also spent three seasons in the KHL where he amassed 146 points.

Messier scored his 1,887 points in 1,756 NHL games, while Jagr has suited up 1,659 times in North America.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

NFL

Peterson return boosts Vikings' playoff push

Adrian Peterson was back on the practice field on Wednesday for the first time in nearly three months, and the Minnesota Vikings hope their star running back can give them the jolt they need to chase down a playoff berth.

Peterson's rehab of a torn meniscus in his right knee is nearly complete, allowing him to rejoin his teammates at practice as he ramps up for a highly anticipated return. Wearing a black brace on his right knee, Peterson took



Adrian Peterson
GETTY IMAGES

handoffs from Sam Bradford, ran routes and went through some agility drills during the portion of practice that was open to media.

Peterson was not available for comment on Wednesday, but did tell a local website that he is still targeting the Dec. 24 game in Green Bay for his first game since the injury. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



NFL IN BRIEF

Pats claim Floyd off waivers

The New England Patriots have claimed wide receiver Michael Floyd off waivers one day after he was released by the Arizona Cardinals.

Floyd's agent Brian Murphy confirmed the move in an email. Floyd, Arizona's first-round draft pick in 2012, was released by the team two days after he was arrested for driving under the influence and failure to obey a police officer. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Newton injury not serious

Panthers coach Ron Rivera said an MRI on quarterback Cam Newton's right shoulder revealed no serious damage and he anticipates the 2015 MVP will play Monday night against the Washington Redskins. Newton was listed as limited Thursday.

Rivera said Thursday that Newton's shoulder is sore and the Panthers "we're bringing him along slowly."

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4 pieces of multi grain bread, toasted
sea salt

Directions

1. Cut tomato and lay out on a plate. Coat with olive oil and sprinkle with sea salt. Let stand.

2. Meanwhile, mash avocado in a medium bowl and then add lemon juice and torn basil. Mix until smooth.

3. Toast bread and then smear about a tablespoon and a half of the avocado spread onto the bread. Finish by adding tomato slices and a few pieces of lettuce.

4. Cut in half or in quarters and serve with some cucumber slices.

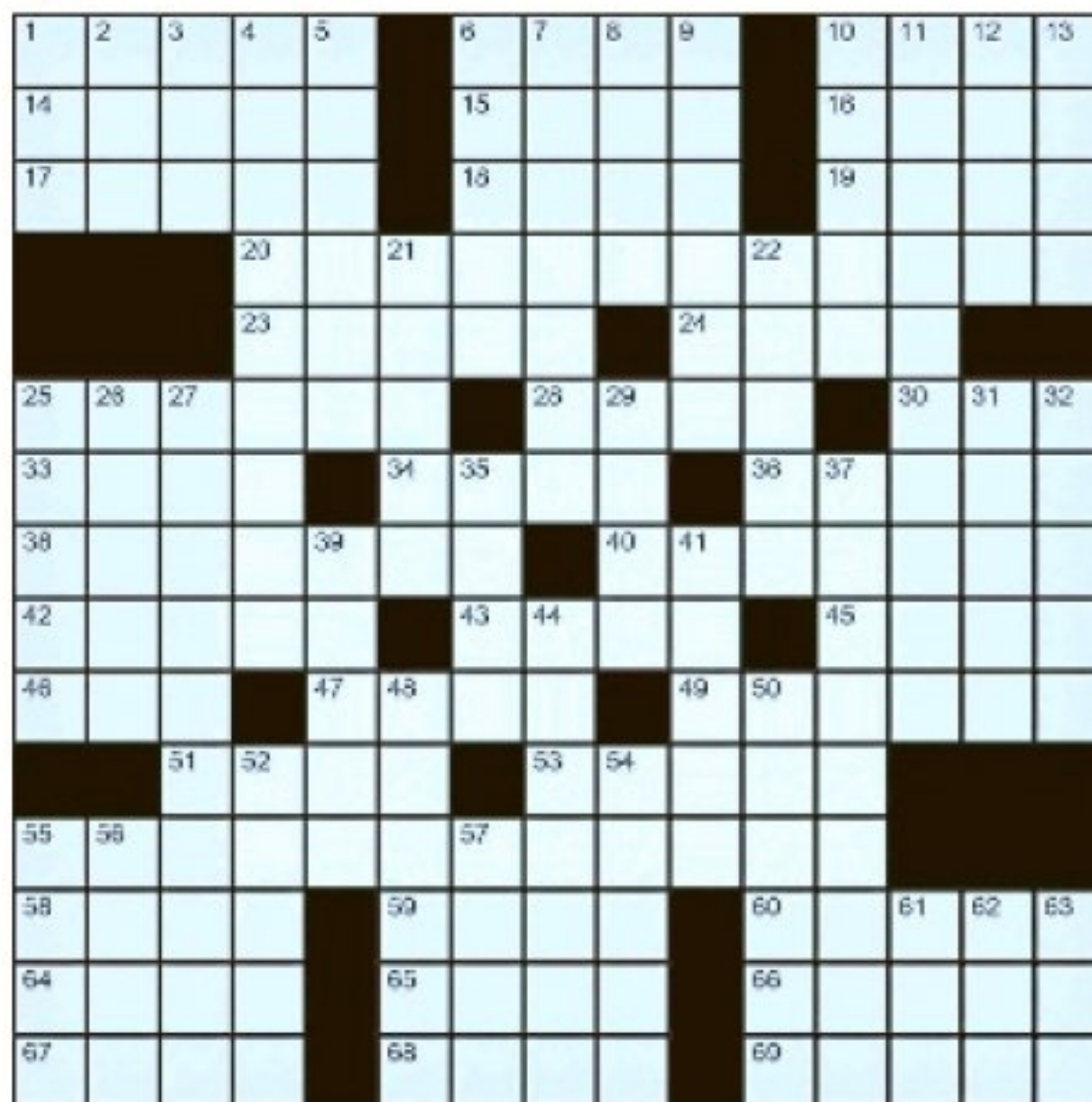
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ACROSS

1. Australian actor Mr. Bana's
6. "Sure ___ standing here..."
10. Ladies
14. "Well, obviously, Sherlock!": 2 wds.
15. Ms. Rowlands of "The Notebook" (2004)
16. Prefix to 'matic'
17. Mouthwash brand
18. Car rental company
19. River of Russia
20. Make the best of a fierce Winter day all bundled up in a toque, scarf and mittens: 3 wds.
23. "Do you have a pencil ___ I can burrow?"
24. All square
25. King Arthur's nephew Knight
28. Julie Harris' role in "East of Eden" (1955)
30. Initials-sharers of Emilio Estevez's actor brother
33. Roman love god
34. "Sesame Street" character
36. Stage stuff
38. Ontario town; or, Ms. Lohan
40. Maneuvered the motor vehicle
42. "Then...?": 2 wds.
43. Wealthy
45. Canvas for a survey
46. Check/de-termine



47. Starring role
49. Housing market
51. Staircase support
53. ___ glue
55. #27-Down's answer is a what?: 2 wds.
58. Slightly open
59. Ballerina's garb
60. Apollo, for one

64. Blight
65. Util. bill
66. Bestow with a trait
67. Comedian Mr. Caesar's
68. Office table
69. Pre-weddings parties

DOWN

1. N n n N and N and n
2. Bird of myth
3. Nuptials vow: 2 wds.
4. Dishes/glasses storage areas
5. TV personality Ms. Shepherd

6. Tequila plant source
7. Time to catch the early train during the work week, e.g.: 2 wds.
8. "Put a sock ___!"
9. Utensil for preparing potatoes
10. Soya ___
11. Canadian song on

- #27-Down: 2 wds.
12. And others, for short: 2 wds.
13. Purchased, in another word
21. Sleeping problem
22. Sidestep
25. Posh parties
26. "Oh My Darling, Clementine" part: "... excavating for ___"
27. Sarah McLachlan's new release featuring classic Christmas tunes
29. Pear variety
31. Extract metal from ore
32. Woefully
35. Vega constellation
37. Quittance
39. Strong
41. Ache a lot
44. Conceptualizes
48. Joyful
50. Projects positivity, perhaps
52. Buenos ___ (Capital of Argentina)
54. ___ the guitar strings
55. Montreal hockey players, to fans
56. Bionic Woman's hometown in California
57. Candy canes time
61. Mount ___ (Peak of Crete)
62. ___-of-war
63. Greenlight reply

* IT'S ALL IN THE STARS Your daily horoscope by Francis Drake

Aries March 21 - April 20
Grab every chance to travel, because you need a change of scenery. Likewise, you will love to learn something new if you take a course or study something unusual.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
You can make headway clearing up loose details about shared property, inheritances, taxes and debt. Just roll up your sleeves and dig in. Now is the time!

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You can learn a lot about your style of relating to friends, spouses and partners at this time. Observe your style of dealing with those who are closest to you.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
You have a lot of stuff, and anything you do to help you feel better organized is a good thing. What can you do today to make your life run more smoothly?

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
You want to play and take time off from drudgery, even if it's just catching a game or going out for dinner or seeing a movie. You need some fun!

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Because you will likely earn more money soon, this is a good time to think about how you can make home repairs. You also might be focused on a parent more than usual.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
This is a busy time for you, because short trips, reading, writing and talking to everyone will keep you on the go. Enjoy this accelerated pace.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
It's important to know what your money scene is. How much do you own? How much do you make? How much do you owe? Information is power.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Make the most of this time with three planets in your sign. It's easy to attract positive situations now, which means you can come out on top.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You might want to hide for a few days, because you're not ready to step out into the world. When your birthday arrives, things will be different.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Enjoy your popularity with others now. Probably more than any other sign in the zodiac, friendships mean a lot to you.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
Because you look so good to bosses and VIPs, use this time to go after what you want. Promote your own agenda. Speak up.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9



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